

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

# *Horizon*

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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THE WARM COUNTRY BY DONALD WINDHAM

STUDIES IN GENIUS—II: ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS  
HIS LIFE AND POETRY BY GERALD BRENAN

UNDER THE SKY BY PAUL BOWLES

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# HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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# COMMENT

THE predicament of the modern writer which was first discussed at length in HORIZON's inquiry on the Cost of Letters and the series dealing with 'Inflationary Decadence' has now been most forcibly taken up by the *New Statesman*, Mr. J. B. Priestley and others. Nothing will be done, because the roots of the evil go down too far into our society for any financial top-dressing which the State might tardily administer to be of any use. There are already signs of a return to that inertia, which is the natural mental climate of these islands. The sales of serious literature are diminishing, the golden moment of periodicals is past, the flirtation between art and politics forgotten, while the affair of the Bankside Power Station proves that though experts may produce an admirable plan for making London once more an agreeable place to live in, it cannot stand against a strictly material short-term priority. And if South London cannot be saved, what chance is there that the proposed linking of Hampstead Heath, Regent's Park and Hyde Park, with the necessary demolitions, will ever be tolerated? Or that artists will ever receive as a favour (since they cannot strike) the concessions which miners can demand as a right? Yet in the long run our export trade depends (through industrial design) nearly as much on art as on coal.

It is interesting to compare the situation here with that in France. In France, if anything, the plight of the artist is worse. The sales of a serious writer are generally on a smaller scale than here, the royalties are less, seldom exceeding ten per cent. The price of a book is lower and the formidable hurdle of translation has to be taken before the vast Anglo-Saxon public can be reached. A writer is not likely to make more than two hundred pounds from a book (which undergoes the same endless delays in appearing as here), nor do any magazines exist which pay large sums for articles or extracts. There is in addition an acute crisis in the production of both magazines and newspapers. There are too many newspapers, and those without large funds or subsidies are being forced to the wall. There are too many irregular luxury magazines, too many specialized literary ones; the rates of pay are generally low because, owing to competition, the circulations are limited and the same kind of article by the same author has a way of appearing over and over again. Inflation and the high cost

of living also reduce the value of a writer's earnings and there is nothing to set against this black picture except the fact that poverty is less humiliating in literary Paris, where nearly all are poor, than perhaps anywhere else, and that the exciting liberty and anonymous independence of the free-lance writer have not yet acquired that taint of irresponsibility with which they are associated in our civic-minded termitaries. There are said to be forty thousand *artistes-peintres* by profession in France today and how most of them live is a mystery, for they are not employed on newspapers, magazines, or by the giant publishing house in whose offices many of the most brilliant intellectuals are to be found. It is an ironical reflection that the contents of an ordinary still-life—a loaf of white bread, a cheese, part of a ham, some butter and a bottle of wine can now be obtained only at a fabulous price on the black market, and a studio not at all. It is the prohibitive price of these necessities which remove painter and writer from the natural tranquil domestic environment enjoyed by their great predecessors and force them to teach, copy, or betray.

Externally Paris has never looked lovelier. Except for the prices it is astoundingly as it was before the war. The black-market *bistro* is vanishing, the normal pre-war restaurants of each quarter coming into their own, there is no longer the feeling that outside the luxury district and the artists' quarter all is want and decay. The small parallelogram between the Palais Royal and the Luxembourg, the Ile St. Louis and the Rue de Bourgogne, still contains what is most alive in the arts of Europe. It is the final stronghold of free spirits against the Anglo-Saxon worship of money and respectability, the bogey of nationalism, or the Slav idols of social realism and the party line. It is the last place where races mingle as easily as the Present and the Past. There is a crop of new and inexpensive 'existentialist' bars and night-clubs which recall the first beginnings of Montparnasse. The new permanent Impressionist museum in the *Jeu de Paume* contains all that was most lovely and most scattered in the Museums before the war. All cafés, not just one or two, within that lovely lozenge are now delightful, and the small hotels of the left bank are all habitable again. Yet, as an American observer pointed out, 'This is the summer—and terribly like Vienna between the wars, when what was once a great capital came to life only between May and September, with the dollars and the tourists and the fine



weather, to sink back for six months into poverty, hunger, cold and darkness when the last of those who thought "Vienna hadn't changed at all" had returned home.' But this verges on the political problems of France, on the endless discussions about Communism and de Gaulle. Rather than make pronouncements on that, we give our readers the translation of a short controversy which has appeared recently in *Combat* (Editor, Albert Camus) and other papers and which reflects the political tension in left-wing circles and the eternal problem of the relations between the democratic belief in the rights of the individual and the Marxist conception of tactics.

## THE NIZAN CASE

PAUL NIZAN may be known to some of our readers through his visit to England during the Spanish War. He was at that time one of the Editors of *Ce Soir* and was also known here as the author of two novels *La Conspiration* and *Le Cheval de Troy*, some of which appeared in *New Writing*. When war broke out he resigned from the Communist Party. As a soldier he was not allowed to publish articles, but he sent a letter announcing his resignation, which was published in the Socialist newspaper *L'Œuvre*. He was in liaison with the British 14th Army Field Workshop when he was killed in action at St. Omer on 23 May 1940. From that moment rumours began to circulate to the effect that he had been employed by the French police as a spy on Communist activities during his membership of the Party. His widow has for long tried to obtain a denial of these rumours, and it was finally to establish their falsity that Sartre and others addressed the original statement to the newspaper *Combat* after an attack on the critical honesty of Nizan had been made by M. Lefebvre in his book *On Existentialism*. Below we give the text of the statement.

'From time to time we are reminded that Jacques Decour, Jean Prevost and Vernet died for us, and it is well that it should be so. But a silence has fallen on the name of Nizan, one of the most gifted writers of his generation, who was killed by the Germans in 1940; no one dares speak his name and it seems as though he was being buried for a second time. Nevertheless, in certain political circles the whisper goes round that he was a traitor. Aragon told one of us that Nizan had informed the Vichy Minister of the Interior of certain military secrets of the Communist Party. If you ask for proof of this, you won't get

any. You will be told that it is common knowledge that shortly before he died, Politzer affirmed this to be so, and that, anyhow, you need only read Nizan's books to see that he was a traitor. In his latest book, *On Existentialism*, M. Lefebvre writes: "Paul Nizan had few friends, and we wondered what was the reason for this. Today we know. All his books have treason as a central theme;" and "He came from reactionary, and even Fascist, surroundings. Perhaps he was one of them, since he pretended to be spying on them."

'Now, to the best of our knowledge, the Communists can only reproach Paul Nizan with the fact that he left the Party in 1939 at the time of the Russo-German pact. Each individual can think what he likes of this: it is a strictly political matter, and it is not our intention to discuss it. But when, without adducing any proof, people accuse Nizan of being a police spy we cannot forget that he was a writer, that he died fighting, and that it is our duty as writers to defend his memory. Thus, we address ourselves to M. Lefebvre (and to all those who, like him, spread these infamous accusations), and we ask them the following question: "When you say that Nizan is a traitor, do you simply mean that he left the Communist Party in 1939? If this is the case, say it quite openly, and everyone will agree with you or not according to his ideas. Or do you mean that, long before the war, Nizan undertook in return for money to inform an anti-Communist government of the activities of your Party? If this is the case, prove it. If we remain without an answer, or if we are not given the proofs for which we ask, we will act on your silence, and will publish a second manifesto affirming Nizan's innocence."

'The undersigned:

'R. Aron, G. Adam, A. Breton, S. de Beauvoir, P. Bost, A. Billy, P. Brisson, J.-L. Bost, J. Benda, Roland Caillois, A. Camus, M. Fombeure, J. Guehenne, Henri Jeanson, J. Lescure, M. Leiris, J. Lemarchand, R. Maher, M. Merleau-Ponty, F. Mauriac, Brice-Parain, J. Paulhan, J.-P. Sartre, J. Schlumberger, Ph. Soupault.

'M. Louis Martin-Chauffier, in an attached letter, "associates himself fully with the intention of our request, but not with its expression".

'He adds: "Paul Nizan was one of my friends . . . I think I knew him fairly well, and I would say entirely if it were a question of clearing his good faith or his honour. Thus, I associate myself fully with the intention of your manifesto. But I can only do it on the margin of the document which you sent me. My relations with my Communist friends, whom it involves, are such that I cannot address them in this tone".

From *Combat* and *Le Littéraire*.

'A manifesto has appeared in the Press which pretends to have the object of defending the memory of Paul Nizan against the accusation "spread by rumour" of having sold information to the Minister of Interior.

'This protest would have seemed fairly natural if the fact that a member of the National Committee of Writers had not been cited by name as an originator of this "rumour" which makes the manifesto appear far more as a manoeuvre to discredit one of us, and through him, our whole committee, than as a defence of the memory of Paul Nizan.

'This kind of personal backbiting obliges us to remind the signatories of the text in question (moreover, themselves, not all equally well equipped to rise up in

the name of morality) that by writing as they have, they have made themselves guilty of or accessories to a dishonest accusation against an unnamed person.

'Acting as they do, these signatories are expressly committing the very crime against which their indignation has been aroused.

'Take note.

(sgd.) The Managing Committee of the National Committee of Writers.'

From *Les Lettres Françaises*

#### LARGE SCALE SPRING MANŒUVRES

'A headline in a paper started a train of thought: "The anti-Communist offensive is in full swing in the United States". But it seems to me that it is also at its height in France. I am not only referring to the unequivocal campaigns of a well-known section of the Press, but also to the manœuvres in which a certain number of intellectuals are engaging.

'Is it pure chance that at this very moment *Paris Presse* is serialising Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* which, under the guise of a novel, is no more than an anti-Communist pamphlet?

'Is it pure chance that, under the excuse of defending Paul Nizan's memory, the militant anti-Communist writers, joined by a few trusting spirits, have united to append their signatures to a revealing elbowing match? Contemplating this eloquent piece, where, beside more literary names, that of the former editor of the German-controlled paper *Aujourd'hui* shines with a rare brilliance, everyone will understand the meaning of such a document.

'I knew Nizan personally—I did not like him because he was a cold character, jealous, above all, of his own reputation. His public repudiation of his Party and his comrades, at the moment when they were persecuted and in danger, filled me with disgust. He reserved his announcement of this event for *Temps*, the organ of the Comité de Forges and for *L'Œuvre*, run by Marcel Deat. A man of good faith would have remained silent. I am not afraid to write this because I know it to be true.

'I concede that his friends should now be anxious to rehabilitate his memory because he died for France. But is this a good enough reason for disseminating these accusations which are injurious to those whom Nizan betrayed?'

C. M.

*Les Lettres Françaises*

#### THE WATCH-DOGS OF ANTI-COMMUNISM

'A few days ago we received a document entitled THE NIZAN CASE and signed by a certain number of writers.

'These gentlemen complain that a great deal is said about Jacques DECOUR, Jean PREVOST and other writers who died in the cause of freedom, and that no one DARES speak of NIZAN and that there are WHISPERS that he was a traitor. They lament, they sigh, and, without a shade of doubt, they attack the Communists, particularly Aragon.

'Because it goes without saying that the aim behind their present manœuvre is not to RESTORE THE MEMORY of NIZAN, for which these Gentlemen don't give a hoot, but to attack the French Communist Party. Thus, it is only necessary to read the names of these protestors to understand the deep meaning behind their move:

'Brice PARAIN, dismissed from *L'Humanité* because he was Editor of a police newspaper, *Detective*; André BRETON, a former guest of Trotsky, the most important servant of the international Political Police against the workers' movement, André BRETON who, in his magazine, denounced his co-signatory of today as a police spy: Jean PAULHAN, the man for whom Roman Rolland was a traitor by the same title as Alphonse de CHATEAUBRIANT; Henri JEANSON, founder and editor of the Nazi newspaper *Aujourd'hui*. And a host of others who do not seem uncomfortable in the company of these "specialists".

'Naturally enough, certain newspapers have already espoused the cause of these gentlemen: *Littérature*, *Carrefour*, *Gavroche*. At the moment when, after the scandalous incidents, provoked at the Assembly by Pierre ANDRÉ and others tarred with the same brush over the debates on Indo-China, all the anti-Communists fling themselves into the attack, those who have just taken up the defence of the "patriot" HARDY, can only be rejoicing at the diversion created in the name of another "patriot", whose claim to this title is immediately considered as incontestable since he is an enemy of our Party.

'NIZAN left the Communist Party in 1939. He left it with a great deal of noise, surrounding his gesture with ostentation, immediately participating in the abominable campaign of calumny which was let loose against the most far-seeing and courageous citizens of France. He left it in the same manner as did GITTON and CAPRON, men of the Political Police . . . Traitor to his Party, he became by the same action a traitor to France because his public pronouncements helped such men as Daladier and Bonnet—against whom he had been writing on the eve of his decision—and the whole fifth column in their criminal political activities. Can we believe that this attitude was anything but the development of previous activity?

'But his present defenders pay no attention to all that. Their preoccupation is fighting the Communists; anything is grist to their mill and their best weapon still remains provocation, cold and deliberate provocation which clothes itself in literary prestige and dissimulates itself behind a hypocritical appeal to morality.

'These gentlemen don't even recoil before the fact of combining with a person like JEANSON, for instance, against the men of the Resistance.

'Enough!

'Five years of suffering have in themselves been a sufficient revelation of what is disguised as anti-Communism, for this manoeuvre to be in itself the judge of those who instigate it, and those who defend it.'

GUY LECLERC

*L'Humanité*

'Monsieur Lefebvre, who has been explicitly implicated, has not replied.

'M. Sartre, on the other hand, has written to us as follows: "Since the National Committee of Writers has shown itself to be so solicitous of the honour of its members, I wish, in the first instance, to state that I am still a member of the Committee and I am not aware of any defence that it has put up on my behalf against the attacks of which I have been the object. Secondly, it was to me that M. Aragon made the statements which have been quoted. Does he think, then, that they are of such a nature as to discredit their originator by the simple

publication of them? Or did he in fact make them to me? In which case it is a question of his word against mine. He should state the facts from his point of view and everyone can then judge as they think fit.”

J-P. SARTRE

‘The writers who signed the protest take note of the declarations made by *L’Humanité* and the National Committee of Writers; they also take note of Monsieur Lefebvre’s silence. We know that Nizan left the Communist Party in 1939: everyone must judge this according to his views. As for the insinuations about his conduct before that date, no proof of their veracity has been forthcoming.’

*Combat*

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HORIZON are shortly publishing a magnificent edition of Goya’s drawings, *Two Hundred Drawings from the Prado*, consisting of four series of drawings, the majority of which have never been reproduced before. The introduction to the volume, by André Malraux, has been translated by Edward Sackville-West. The edition is limited, price £2 2s., and orders may now be placed with booksellers.



## DIANA WITHERBY

### THE PRISONER

The sail in the cellar sways, blown  
By an indoor wind, mast against stone.  
Tide-washed debris revolves on the floor,  
Lapping round the enormous door  
Which is his sky. Chinks look out on a day  
Black as the fur of rats,  
Ferns are changed to fungi and birds to bats;  
His heart has a jaw of teeth ready to close  
On the unjust and the just, the sawdust and the flower,  
His mind, which always craved a night-light,  
And was denied, hangs in a far dark bell,  
Rung by a bang-aimed blow outside.

There, but for the grace of chance  
And kisses, go all who can, with swans, float  
Through dazzle in a golden wheel of water, leaves  
And blaze; who can, with dusty bees,  
Fly to their twilight homes. But when they shut themselves in,  
Under their chimneys and creepers,  
How soon they forget the free air silk!  
How soon they begin to scrub, even their children's smiles—  
*I hate, I fear, but this, in my focus, is clean,  
When I have scrubbed I have rest.*  
And their eyes close hard, like their doors,  
On all that cannot be scoured,  
They will not look at the birds,  
And they will not look at the cell,  
Where the prisoner's measure of time  
Is continuous dusk and a night.  
For, long ago, his sun fell under the guillotine,  
Carrying the last flash away  
Of pear warm summer and the day.

KENNETH REXROTH  
ANOTHER SPRING<sup>1</sup>

I

Now, on this day of the first hundred flowers,  
Fate pauses for us in imagination,  
As it shall not ever in reality—  
As these swifts that link endless parabolas  
Change guard unseen in their secret crevices.  
Other anniversaries that we have walked  
Along this hillcrest through the black fir forest,  
Past the abandoned farm, have been just the same—  
Even the fog necklaces on the fence-wires  
Seem to have gained or lost hardly a jewel;  
The annual and diurnal patterns hold.  
Even the attrition of the cypress grove  
Is slow and orderly, each year one more tree  
Breaks ranks and lies down, decrepit in the wind.  
Each year, on summer's first luminous morning,  
The swallows come back, whispering and weaving  
Figure eights around the sharp curves of the swifts,  
Plaiting together the summer air all day,  
That the bats and owls unravel in the nights.  
And we come back, the signs of time upon us,  
In the pause of fate, the threading of the year.

II

It is impossible to see anything  
In this dark; but I know this is me, Rexroth,  
Plunging through the night on a chilling planet.  
It is warm and busy in this vegetable  
Darkness where invisible deer feed quietly.  
The sky is warm and heavy, even the trees  
Over my head cannot be distinguished,  
But I know they are knobcone pines, that their cones

<sup>1</sup>Reprinted from 'The Phoenix and the Tortoise', by permission of  
*New Directions*.

Endure unopened on the branches, at last  
To grow imbedded in the wood, waiting for fire  
To open them and reseed the burned forest.  
And I am waiting, alone, in the mountains,  
In the forest, in the darkness, and the world  
Falls swiftly on its measured ellipse.

## III

I am a man with no ambitions  
And few friends, wholly incapable  
Of making a living, growing no  
Younger, fugitive from some just doom.  
Lonely, ill-clothed, what does it matter?  
At midnight I make myself a jug  
Of hot white wine and cardamom seeds.  
In a torn grey robe and old beret,  
I sit in the cold writing poems,  
Drawing nudes on the crooked margins,  
Copulating with sixteen-year-old  
Nymphomaniacs of my imagination.

## IV

There are sparkles of rain on the bright  
Hair over your forehead;  
Your eyes are wet and your lips  
Wet and cold, your cheek rigid with cold.  
Why have you stayed  
Away so long, why have you only  
Come to me late at night  
After walking for hours in wind and rain?  
Take off your dress and stockings;  
Sit in the deep chair before the fire.  
I will warm your feet in my hands;  
I will warm your breasts and thighs with kisses.  
I wish I could build a fire  
In you that would never go out.  
I wish I could be sure that deep in you  
Was a magnet to draw you always home.

v

The seasons revolve and the years change  
With no assistance or supervision.  
The moon, without taking thought,  
Moves in its cycle, full, crescent, and full.

The white moon enters the heart of the river;  
The air is drugged with azalea blossoms;  
Deep in the night a pine cone falls;  
Our campfire dies out in the empty mountains.

The sharp stars flicker in the tremulous branches;  
The lake is black, bottomless in the crystalline night;  
High in the sky the Northern Crown  
Is cut in half by the dim summit of a snow peak.

O heart, heart, so singularly  
Intransigent and corruptible,  
Here we lie entranced by the starlit water,  
And moments that should each last forever  
Slide unconsciously by us like water.

*DONALD WINDHAM*

## THE WARM COUNTRY

THE big brown buck negro George borrowed three dollars from Thomas Williams in the barrel factory one Friday afternoon. The factory stood in the centre of a cinder field heated by both fire and the summer sun; below its pot lid of a roof, steam oozed from a steam-run along one wall of the shop and the heat shimmered above a row of ovens down the centre. The men were running the last barrels of the day through the machines. Their bodies were filtered with sweat and coated with wood-dust.

Williams was a thin white man with pale red hair. Ten years in the shop had made him tired and quiet. His was the last machine. He caught the barrels as George threw them to him from the sander, put them on the machine before him and clamped down the metal hoops which held them in shape. The image of George, arms at reach, throwing the barrels, remained in Williams's mind as he watched the hoops slide down over the staves. George was

the biggest man physically that Williams had ever seen. Williams believed in living his own life and letting others live theirs, in minding his own business and speaking only when spoken to. But he admired George's strong easy body. The negro's strength and ease made him forget the reticence he felt toward the white men with whom he worked, and as he turned to George to catch the next to last barrel he called to him over the clangour of falling iron and the screech of yielding wood.

'Got five dollars overtime this week. Scarrett forgot to make me take time off for my overtime. And I bet he's sorry, because he watches this company's money like it was his own.'

The negro stopped his machine and looked straight at the white man.

'Yes, sir, I guess you'll be having a big weekend. Take home a pint or two.'

'No, I'm saving for the house I'm going to build,' Williams answered.

The thought of his house and his wife, Lola, restored his reticence. He glanced at George, who was taking off a glove and wiping the sweat and wood-dust from around his eyes with his big hand, then turned back to his machine thinking the conversation was over.

But George was still interested. He laid both his gloves on the sanding machine and walked toward Williams.

'If you're going to put away three dollars till next week, I sure would appreciate making use of them. I'd pay you back first thing,' he said.

The mention of borrowing made Williams contract upon himself and he became intent on cleaning his machine.

'What makes you think you'll have more money next week than this,' he said:

His remark was not intended as a question and he hoped that George would go away. But George was only started.

'I just got to pay this doctor bill this week. Honest, that's all, Mister Williams. You remember when I was sick last month and Mister Scarrett took me to the doctor to be sure I had the piles and wasn't just saying so? Well, he took me to his doctor instead of the company's. I didn't know nothing about it being his doctor, or owing a bill, or nothing till he came to me this week and said I got to pay it right away or be sued. You've seen my car I got:



I been buying it to ride to work in and to take my wife riding on Sundays. Well, I got to pay on that this week too, and paying on both don't leave me nothing to live on. If you'd lend me three dollars it'd be like part out this week and part out next.'

Williams had kept his eyes on his machine and had not spoken during all the pauses; but now, without looking up, he said:

'Why don't you borrow it from Scarrett? He's got plenty of money, I haven't.'

Williams disliked Scarrett and knew how he lent money to the negroes, one dollar for two back on payday, five for ten. Still, he did not want to have anything to do with lending money.

George knew that Williams disliked Scarrett.

'He won't lend it to me, Mister Williams. I asked him. I told him honestly what I wanted with it, just like I told you. And he said didn't no nigger need to have an automobile if he couldn't pay what he owed.'

'What a bastard,' Williams said.

'But I told him, Mister Williams. He's got two automobiles, you know, a little one and a big one. And I told him didn't no man need two automobiles more than I needed one.'

Williams laughed. When George saw him laugh, he shook his own body with laughter, loud and long, and beat his fists against his thighs as if in an effort to control himself.

'Sure enough, Mister Williams, lend me three dollars.'

Blue smoke from the extinguished ovens began to smart Williams's eyes. George had pushed the one remaining barrel between them and was leaning on it looking up at him. Williams looked at his machine, but as before the image of the negro remained in his mind. It was an idea of his that big people like George were honest and kind and that small people like Lola were underhanded and cruel. If she found out that he had lent money to anyone, especially a negro, she would curse at him and call him a fool. But if she did not find out, the money would be better with George using it for a week than it would be lying at the bottom of his dresser drawer. He seemed to see himself putting his hands out and touching the image of George, helping George's life forward by lending him the money, as he might help a child he found in front of a circus by buying him a ticket and sending him in. Tensely, he took his wallet from his pocket and counted out three dollars to George.

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'I have to have it back next Friday,' he said.

'Yes, sir, you will,' George said.

'Next Friday, don't forget.'

George thanked him until Scarrett came through the shop, walking briskly, chewing on the end of an unlighted cigar, and shouting for the men to hurry and finish their cleaning. Williams slopped a handful of grease on to his machine, and George turned back to the sander and with his hands began to push the mounds of odorous wood-dust from it into the incinerator.

Williams arrived in the white locker-room before anyone else, stepped over the benches to his locker and dropped off his sweat-soaked coveralls. Work had not made him strong, but enervated him. He was pale and thin, with no chest, no buttocks, not even a stomach. He walked into the shower, turned on the water, and picked up a small white piece of soap from the tile floor. As he soaped himself he looked down at his body, and an image, which seemed to be himself with George's huge body, half formed in his imagination before he stepped under the cold water and obliterated it.

During lunch hour the next Friday, while the men were being paid, a box-car full of the flat round barrel ends came in on the railway siding, and as soon as the whistle blew Scarrett sent the negroes out to empty it. Williams had not spoken to George, so he went out to the loading platform to look for him. He found him standing in the door of the box-car framed by the light blue sky and two smoke-stacks.

'Got your money?' Williams asked.

The company paid in cheques.

'I gave my cheque to Uncle Weaver to cash while he's out on the lumber truck. I'll give it to you as soon as he comes back,' George said.

The negro stood in the car towering high above the white man. Williams turned and went back into the dirt and heat of the factory. Half an hour before the five o'clock whistle he went out again to ask George about the money. George was still in the doorway of the box-car, tossing out the heavy round bundles of barrel heads. The car was nearly empty, and the negroes were exhausted. George stopped and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

'Uncle Weaver hasn't come back yet,' he said.

'O.K. I'll meet you down by the time-clock at five.'

Williams knew that any other man would have been angry and would have cursed. He wondered if the negro thought he could get by without paying the money, but he decided that what George said was true. He knew that negroes were the dumbest people in the world, and he laughed at the idea that George might try to fool him.

He dressed impatiently, without taking a shower, and was down at the time-clock by five. He leaned with his back against the wall by the clock and watched the stairs from the negro locker-room for fifteen minutes. Almost everyone who worked in the factory came and punched out for the night before he saw George's head appear around the corner at the top of the stairs, peep like a child playing hide and go seek, disappear, and after a pause reappear as he sauntered down the stairs toward the clock.

A worried expression was on George's face.

'He ain't come in yet, Mister Williams. I'm going up to the back gate and wait for him because I've got to have my money, and if you want to wait here I'll bring that three dollars down to you when he comes,' George said and hurried away.

Williams stood by the clock feeling hurt and out of place. George had been so unfriendly as he shunned him. But it was ridiculous for him to wait at one end of the factory while George waited at the other, and he walked through to the back gate. The gateman was sitting on the concrete foundation of the cyclone fence which enclosed the factory and was watching George and another negro who stood on the side-walk outside talking to a man in a car at the curb. He nodded to Williams as he came up and said:

'They were better off as slaves.'

He lit his pipe, crossed his knees with his hands around them, and sat smoking. Williams still felt out of place and he leaned against the wire fence without saying anything. After a few minutes George came over to the fence and asked if he could speak to him. Williams walked to where the negro stood. The brown face was distressed, the eyes sad and the mouth anxious.

'This man here is waiting to take me and Oliver down to the Hub clothing store to pay our time instalment, and he says he won't wait much longer. Could you lend me two dollars to pay him and get back five instead of three from Uncle Weaver when he comes?'

Williams tried to be angry but he was only terribly embarrassed. He said that he did not have any cash, only his cheque.

'Uncle Weaver's sure to be here in a few minutes, but this man ain't going to wait and they'll garnishee my salary if I don't pay. Please, Mister Williams.'

'I told you I haven't a damned cent,' Williams said.

'The gateman'll lend it to you. He won't lend it to me, but he'll lend it to you. And you can give it back to him the minute Uncle Weaver comes,' George pleaded.

Williams was glad to have an excuse to get away from the negro. Quickly, he turned and walked to the gateman and borrowed two dollars although he knew that he was doing something of which he did not approve. It was difficult for him to face George to give him the money for he half knew that the negro was betraying him. He handed the two dollars through the wire fence. George took them, thanked him with a clown smile, ran to the car and was gone.

At six, the gateman locked the wire back gate and walked through to the front. Williams followed. Ten minutes later, Weaver drove up in the long yellow truck and stopped to get the back gate and garage keys. As Weaver jumped down from the truck, Williams walked stiffly over to him.

'George asked me to tell you that he wants you to give me five dollars out of the money from his cheque that you cashed,' he said.

'George? What cheque? George who?' Weaver asked.

'George, the one who calls you Uncle Weaver. Who do you think? Didn't he give you his cheque to get cashed?' Williams demanded.

His voice trembled with anger. The old negro smiled, then said solemnly:

'Yes, sir, but I ain't got no money of George's now. I gave it all back to him this afternoon. I'm looking for him to pay *me* something.'

Williams looked at him, as though he had not heard what he said, and repeated:

'He told me that you had the money from his cheque and said for you to give me five dollars.'

But the old negro only denied having any money which belonged to George, took the keys and drove the truck away.

As he walked home through the darkening day, Williams felt his capacity for friendship hurt, his vanity bruised, and his love wounded. Gradually, he was angry. If George thought him stupid rather than friendly, George would find out differently.

Monday morning was cool. As soon as he reached the factory, Williams paid the gateman and went to find George. He came across the negro sitting on the loading platform with his feet dangling over the railway siding, enjoying a last smoke before work. George held the cigarette between the thumb and first finger of his immense hand and watched the thin wisps of smoke streaking away in the wind. When he saw Williams, he began a rapid stumbling speech explaining that Uncle Weaver had been afraid to give Williams the money, that it was a misunderstanding, and that he was powerfully sorry.

'That's all right. Just give it to me now,' said Williams.

His voice was pale and thin.

'I ain't got it now. I don't ever have no money on Mondays,' said George.

The whistle blew, and George hurried away. Williams stood on the windy platform and sucked in his lips until they were only a straight line. George had known that he owed him the money and if what he said was true he should have saved it to pay him.

When he went inside he did not say anything for he knew that if he did George would have an excuse, would say that his wife was sick or something like that.

He tore into his work with an obliterating intensity, but he could not forget the friendliness, the strength and the ease of the body working the next machine. His attempt to meet the friendliness had been frustrated. All week the frustration danced like electric sparks within him. The negro's body attracted his eyes like a magnet, and at the end of each day he was exhausted by the effort he had spent in holding his eyes back. He neither looked at George nor spoke to him. By Thursday, George was frightened of the silence and spoke to Williams. He said that his wife was sick and that he hoped Williams would wait another week for his money. Williams said that he was sorry but that if George did not pay him he would have to borrow himself. George offered to pay interest for more time, but Williams answered that he did not want George's money, only his own, and refused to discuss it any more.



He walked away and went to the machine shop to get some grease for his machine. While he was filling the can, he heard a group of negroes talking outside the window and, as he listened, he heard George's name. The conversation was about a coloured girl who had come to the office that morning and told Scarrett that George was the father of her child and would not support it. She was not very pretty; Scarrett had sent her away and told her not to come back. Scarrett did not like negroes coming about the office, and one of the voices said that if anyone was owed money by George he had better get it back quickly for Scarrett did not like George and might fire him. The talk was grave, but another voice laughed and said that it did not matter: if you were not paid what you were owed, you did not pay what you owed, and in the end it came out the same.

Williams walked back to the shop wondering if George would be fired. But even if George were, his life was carefree in comparison with Williams's own. The negro lived happily in a shack, and even the woman he lived with was probably not his wife. He thought bitterly about the negro's freedom and his own responsibility to his house and Lola, and he told himself that he did not care if the negro were fired. This was the day he greased the inside of his machine and usually he asked George to lift the heavy iron lid off the top for George could remove it without effort. Today, he did it himself, smiling righteously and straining the nerves in his arms till they felt like piano wires drawn through the flesh.

After work, when he arrived home, he found Lola in the kitchen, wearing a gaudy dress and with her hair tied up in a towel. She dished up the vegetables, poured the buttermilk, and they sat down to supper. She was so silent that he sensed something was wrong besides the fact that he was late and they were going to her sister's house after supper.

When she started talking it was about how little it had cost to build Joe's and sister's house, which he had heard many times before.

'But we have to wait while prices go up. We have to be the tail goat in everything,' she added.

He went on eating without answering. She stood up from the table and walked to the stove.

'How come there ain't deposits in the bank for the last two weeks?'

Calmly, Williams told her that he had not been to town, that the money was in the bottom of his dresser drawer. But she had looked in the drawer and knew how much was there. She began to curse him softly, letting her voice rise gradually as she asked if he had been gambling or if he had spent it on some other woman or on whisky. He pushed his chair back from the table and, without looking at her or answering, walked out of the house. The screen door banged, and Lola's voice screamed:

'Don't think you'll find me here when you get back. I'm going to my sister's house, and I'm going to tell her . . .'

Williams walked across the backyard and through the fields near the railroad tracks. Beyond the sad buildings before him, beyond the highway, the factory stood on a high cinder field banked against the buildings of the city. The day was not yet dark, but the sky was bruised blue and black, and in the factory the nightwatchman's light burned like an early star fallen to earth. That's where I work, he thought vaguely. He did not want to walk toward town or back toward the house. All his righteous feeling was gone. Lola had made him feel like a fool; but she need not worry, he was not a fool.

He turned and went to the Marietta Café and drank a beer. When he started home again, he bought a pint of Green River Rye in the liquor store next door and stopped for a drink in the alley on his way back to the fields. Lola was still gone when he reached the house, and he lay on the couch in the living room with the bottle of rye sitting on the floor beneath his head. Night came and it was dark when the bottle was empty. He was drunk. He could not see the furniture as he staggered into the middle of the room and stood there trying to imitate George's gestures as he threw the barrels from the sanding machine. His head was dizzy, his legs stumbled and his feet wobbled. The almost bare room revolved slowly. But the picture in his mind of what he was doing was bright and clear: George bent forward and reached, his body stretched in his coveralls moving ranges of flesh beneath the strong cloth, his two brown hands caught the barrel and spun it like a comet out into space. He caught barrels and spun them, again and again, till the air was full of burning cylinders like a shower of falling stars. Then George began to shrink. Williams could not see him; they were standing back to back in the door of the box-car, working with their shoulders bumping as they threw out the

heavy bundles of barrel heads. But he could feel George's shoulders descending like a chill down his own spine as George grew smaller. Williams dared not turn. In the dark beyond he could see the wild faces of the other factory hands, watching, betting on who would win. As he worked faster he grew larger and felt George grow smaller till George reached only to the small of his back. Then his end of the car was empty and he spun around. George was shrinking, shrinking, shrinking, till he struggled to move objects which were his own size. Then he lay between two cracks on the box-car floor and was no larger than a shrivelled brown apple. Fear entered Williams's heart. His eyes burned and blurred. With a great effort he tried to stop himself from falling, but slowly he descended through space, slowly thinking: I will get my money back. Then he lay on the hard floor.

Friday, after the machines stopped pounding at noon, the silence was like a steady noise. Williams shut the door of his green locker and walked out toward the paymaster's office counting the money in his wallet. His head was heavy from drinking, his mouth was dry and thin on his skull-shaped face. In the shadow of the office, the factory-hands sat or lay about the concrete platform and their voices drifted in the breeze as they laughed and shouted. Williams stood at one end of the building against the wall. When the paymaster's window opened, the men scrambled to their feet and waited silently for their names to be called. Williams moved to the pay-window with them. As each man received his cheque, he ran off shouting and laughing again. Williams took his and stood aside waiting for the negroes to be paid. When George received his cheque he was forced to pass Williams on his way to the factory. His large eyes looked shyly at the white man. Williams returned the look boldly. The negro was beautiful. The sunlight glistened on the curve of his full lips, the ball of his high cheekbone, and the cord of his heavy neck. He held his cheque out before him with the manner in which strong men handle gentle things, and he lowered his eyes.

Williams spoke with determination.

'I'll cash your cheque for you, George,' he said.

He continued to look at the negro, and George raised his eyes humbly.

'I'm going to give it to you, just like I said I was,' he answered.

Gesturing like a child in a play, he pointed to the machine shop.

'I'll go borrow a pencil to endorse it with.'

'I have one,' Williams said.

George turned back and accepted the stub. Together they walked into the factory where the air was warmer than in the sun. George rested his cheque on the flat end of a barrel and scrawled his name across the back in sprawling letters.

'You ain't going to take out but half of it this week, are you, Mister Williams.'

'All of it,' Williams said.

'No, sir, don't. Five dollars out won't leave me nothing.'

'I have to have it all,' said Williams.

He began to tremble. He had to look up to see the face of the negro even though the negro was stooped over, and when George lifted his hand for a moment Williams thought he was going to strike him. A shudder ran down his back as though he had stepped barefooted on a bug. George was talking, but Williams could not hear.

'No,' he said.

George said something about his wife having a baby.

'No,' Williams shouted.

His voice was much louder than he meant it to be and it startled him. George stopped speaking in the middle of a sentence. Williams put the cheque in his wallet and held out the money which was left for George. George waited so long to take it, removed his hands from his pockets and advanced them towards Williams so slowly, that Williams's outstretched hand began to tremble.

The money was gone. George was walking away along the aisle between the rows of smoking barrels and machines. The swerving line of his back dropped from shoulders to buttocks like a bare foot running from toes to heel. Williams could feel the body departing, moving away from him, leaving him deserted, stranded, spent.

He did not know if he were happy or miserable, hot or cold. Weakly, he walked to the locker-room and felt that he was going to be sick. He sat in a bench, shivering, staring at a small white piece of soap on the tile floor, thinking that he would have to take a shower if he were going home.

GERALD BRENNAN

STUDIES IN GENIUS: II

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

HIS LIFE AND POETRY

*Ecco chi crescerà li nostri amori (Paradiso V)*

II: POETRY

THE DATES

The poetry of San Juan de la Cruz that we want to read comprises five poems that cover between them sixteen pages of a small book. Only one of these poems, the *Cántico Espiritual*, is of any length: the other four are all quite short. Besides these he wrote a small number of *romances* and other verses, which as poetry have only minor claims to our attention.

We are able to date most of these poems fairly accurately. The *Cántico Espiritual* was begun in the prison at Toledo in 1578, and we are told that before his release he had written as far as the stanza commencing *O ninfas de Judea*. This, however, is less informing than it appears, since we cannot say in what order the verses then stood (two versions with quite different orders have come down to us) or how many stanzas were added later. But in all probability he finished the poem soon after his escape, whilst living at El Calvario, though one stanza was added at a later date.

We are also told that the companion poem, the *Noche Oscura*, was written in prison. The evidence for this, however, is not so good, since it depends on the depositions made by witnesses in 1627. As this poem is in the same metre as the *Cántico*, it may easily have been confused with it or else with another poem, to be mentioned in a moment, which is also about night. But there are strong internal reasons for supposing that, if not composed in prison, it was soon after. The style and subject are almost precisely the same as those of the *Cántico* and it describes an escape on a dark night, in disguise, down a secret ladder.

As for the other poems, we know that one of the most original and beautiful, the *Villancico*, which has the refrain *Aunque es de noche*, was written in prison. So was the *romance* *Super flumina*



*Babylonia*, which, with certain other very dull *romances* composed to illustrate Catholic dogmas, he dictated immediately after his release. The pastoral poem, *Un pastorcico solo está penado* cannot be dated, but is obviously early. There remains, of the poems we need to consider, only the *Llama de amor viva*; this was written at Granada in 1583 or 1584.

Thus we see that almost the whole of the poetry of San Juan de la Cruz that we wish to read was written during the short period—say a year and a half—between his starting to write in prison in 1578 and his leaving El Calvario for Baeza in June 1579. If he wrote anything before his imprisonment, it has not come down to us, unless perhaps it is *Un pastorcico*.

### INFLUENCES

A poet grows up in a certain medium and draws his forms, diction, and so forth from his predecessors. This is what I mean by influences. They are especially important in the case of San Juan de la Cruz because he had read very little poetry and what he had read he absorbed thoroughly. Sr. Dámaso Alonso, a distinguished Spanish poet and critic, in his excellent book on San Juan's poetry, has gone into this question with great thoroughness. He divides the influences into Spanish and Biblical, to which, I think, should be added, more vaguely, those of Latin poetry, particularly of Virgil and Horace.

The Spanish influences comprise the *Romanceros* or Ballad books and the *Cancioneros* or Song books, which it would be impossible for any Spaniard of that age not to know because their verses were sung everywhere; and one great name, Garcilaso de la Vega. Let us take the *Cancioneros* and *Romanceros* first. Their influence is comparatively slight in the *Cántico* and *Noche Oscura*, but very strong in the shorter, less meditated, poems. Many of these are just transmutations into religious terms of popular love songs. The most remarkable is the *villancico* *Que bien sé yo la fonte que mana y corre*, where one has a variation with a singularly effective refrain, *Aunque es de noche*, on the current type of Castilian popular song.

The peculiarity of the Spanish *villancico* is that it begins with an *estribillo*, or theme-verse, of two or three lines, which is developed or glossed in the succeeding stanzas. In its primitive form of folk-song made to be danced to, each stanza ended with an echo

of the original *estribillo*, but under the influence of the fifteenth-century schools of music, the number of stanzas was cut down and the return or echo woven in with greater subtléty. San Juan's treatment is original: he has taken, as the custom was, his *estribillo* from an old popular song, altering it perhaps a little; then he has shortened the stanzas to two lines each and let the weight of the poem rest on the peculiarly insinuating refrain, which acts on the reader with the effect of a whispered incantation. In doing this he was taking a leaf from the oldest type of folk poetry in the Peninsula, the Galician *cossante*. Yet the metre in which he has chosen to write it is the hendecasyllable—a new metre introduced from Italy.

It is, however, the three major poems—the *Cántico*, *Noche Oscura* and *Llama*—that chiefly call for discussion, because they alone are works of great and conscious art. They owe their existence to Garcilaso de la Vega, the introducer of the Italian Renaissance style or *arte nuevo* to Spain and the creator of the poetry of the Golden Age. Garcilaso was a young Castilian nobleman and soldier at the Court of Charles V, who, like Sir Philip Sidney, possessed all those accomplishments of mind and body which Castiglione had declared were proper to a courtier. Influenced by his friend Boscán, he began to write poems in Italian metres with greater smoothness and more musical rhythms than had yet been written in Spanish. In particular he introduced the hendecasyllable, which had three more syllables than the classical Castilian metre. Then in 1536 he was killed with his poems still unpublished. Boscán died in 1542, and it was not until the following year that the work of the two poets was published by Boscán's widow. The book produced an enormous sensation: from now on it became impossible for a young poet to write except in the Italian manner.

The bulk of Garcilaso's work consists of eclogues and sonnets. In its subject matter and style it is Renaissance poetry; the refined sense of beauty, the artificiality of the pastoral themes, the diffused and sublimated sensuality, were all taken over from the Italian and introduced for the first time to Spanish readers. But what I think was of more importance than this was the purity and elegance in the choice of language that the new poetry brought with it. Up to this time Castilian had been a strong, crude idiom, capable of certain effects in poetry but too stiff and

limited in scope for others. Garcilaso refined it and made it musical. He did this as much perhaps by the study of Horace and Virgil as by that of Politian and Sannazaro—or rather, let us say, it was they who taught him how a rich and sonorous poetry could be written on an ear trained by the Latins. For Latin poetry taught the importance of quantity. Without attention to the quantity of words, poetry in a stressed language will generally have something thin and monotonous about it. It will flow too quickly and carelessly for the words to produce their full musical effects. Its combinations of vowels and consonants will be elementary. It is only by taking into consideration the length of time that syllables take to be pronounced and the separate qualities of each of them that the speed of the line can be controlled and more intricate rhythms built up within (and even across) the framework of the metrical pattern. And this is Garcilaso's supreme merit. His verse is slow, languorous, melancholy—proper poetry for a young man whose theme is unsuccessful love—but its rhythms charm the ear by their faultlessness like those of *Lycidas*, and every word is made to give out as it passes the full effects of which it is capable.

We may suppose that San Juan de la Cruz first read Garcilaso as a young man at Medina del Campo and that he saturated himself in him. His ear would already have been prepared for this by his study of the Latin poets. It is not likely that he opened his book again after leaving Salamanca, for when he joined the Carmelite Reform he put away everything that did not belong to religion. How then did he come to conceive of writing poetry himself? The immediate stimulus would seem to have been a religious poet called Sebastián de Córdoba, an Andalusian from Ubeda. Córdoba was a third-rate versifier who had the idea of writing a pastiche of Garcilaso, in which the love poetry of his eclogues is turned line by line into a religious allegory of the love of God for the soul. His book was published in 1575, whilst San Juan was at Avila, and we know that he read it because he quotes from it. The most probable hypothesis is, as Sr. Alonso suggests, that the reading of Córdoba revived earlier memories of Garcilaso and suggested the possibility of writing erotic poems on a mystical subject. His imprisonment in 1577–1578 provided the immediate incentive.

But what precisely was Garcilaso's influence on San Juan de la Cruz's poetry? In the first place there is the form. Nearly all San

Juan's poems are in hendecasyllables. Then his two major poems are written in a kind of strophe known as the *lira*, in which Garcilaso had written a famous *canción*. If one looks at the first two stanzas of *Si de mi baja lira* (sometimes known as *La Flor de Gnido*) and compares them to the *Cántico Espiritual* one will see the strong resemblance. The *lira* is a very beautiful form, difficult to use but capable of great lyrical effects. Garcilaso, whose style is a little too languid for such a dithyrambic measure, took it from Bernardo Tasso, who had invented it expressly to convey in a stressed language the effect of Horace's Odes.

A third poem whose form San Juan borrowed from Garcilaso is the *Llama de Amor Viva*. This is a late poem, written at Granada, which in my opinion has been over praised. Although it is carefully written and contains at least one magnificent line, it does not rise as San Juan's best poems do; there is something halting about it. Perhaps the reason for this is that the form of its stanzas was taken from the semi-strophe of one of Garcilaso's eclogues and does not therefore suit the lyrical intention. Or had the conjunction of events that led to his brief poetic phase already passed?

Another feature that Juan de la Cruz took from Garcilaso was the pastoral idiom. The *Cántico Espiritual* is conceived in the form of a pastoral, in which the Lover and the Beloved converse together among woods and hills. The most rapid reading will show that it teems with the conventional words and images of pastoral poetry, as also, like Milton's early poems, with words actually used by real shepherds. Here San Juan was not following Garcilaso, but acting on his own account. But perhaps this idea of giving a pastoral setting to a poem on a mystical subject will strike us as incongruous; we should remember then that the principal ground-work of the poem, the Hebrew *Song of Songs*, was itself regarded as a religious pastoral and had in fact inspired much pastoral poetry in the Early Middle Ages. (Some scholars go so far as to believe that the pastoral form was evolved from it.) However, our taste today is certainly jarred by an allusion—in a passage describing the Beatific Vision—to *la dulce Filomena*.

But the *Cántico Espiritual* is not the only poem of San Juan's to interpret a pastoral situation *a lo divino*. In the tenderest of his *canções*, *Un pastorcico solo está penado*, the poet describes how a shepherd, filled with love for his absent shepherdess, hangs himself on a tree. It is of course an allegory of the Crucifixion, and

when one remembers the parable of the Good Shepherd and the Shepherd imagery in the Psalms one sees that nothing could be more natural than this treatment. But San Juan had not invented it himself: as Sr. Alonso has pointed out, his poem is closely modelled on a passage where Sebastián de Córdoba had expanded a line of Garcilaso's on a shepherd and a tree into an image of the Crucifixion. The languid pathos of the rhythm, so unusual in San Juan, is a distant reflection of Garcilaso's melody.

But borrowings of form and idiom are not all that San Juan de la Cruz owes to Garcilaso. Different though his style is—I will come to this later—and immense the difference in their temperaments, the hand of the Renaissance nobleman is felt everywhere in the three major poems. Countless images and turns of phrase recall him and even such a Sanjuanesque feature as the invocations to the birds, beasts, hills and other 'creatures' in the *Cántico*, and their association with the action of the poem is derived from Garcilaso's first eclogue. Indeed, one cannot read Sr. Alonso's careful and scholarly comparison without being amazed by the number of passages in San Juan's poems that have been taken over from the earlier poet and transformed into something entirely different. Yet even so it is in the prosody that the debt is strongest. Here San Juan de la Cruz is under the same obligations as Luis de León and all the other lyric poets of his age. The purity and elegance of the language, the musical quality of the phrases, and especially the consummate sense for the volumes of words all derive through Garcilaso from Italy. It is this sense (analogous to the feeling for mass in painting) that allows lines to detach themselves from the context and resonate by themselves. In the *arte nuevo* one has for the first time in Spain a poetry that has been matured and brought to its highest potentiality of musical expression by an attention to quantity, as English poetry later was by Spenser and Milton. The reason that this had not happened before is that Spanish poetry, though tinged by the new currents of the Renaissance, had lingered on in association with popular poetry, which was meant to be sung. Now a poetry had appeared that had learned, like Latin poetry, to make its own music.

An equally important influence on San Juan's poetry was the Bible and in particular the *Song of Songs*. This is something both more and less than a prosodic influence: in the case of the *Cántico*, at all events, the Hebrew text provides a secondary layer of

imagery and poetry, from which the poem rises and to which in strange echoes and allusions it returns. Let us try to see how this happens.

The *Song of Songs* is a collection of Jewish folksongs used at marriages and dating in their present form from the third century B.C. The fact that they contain an allusion to Solomon led to the belief that they had been written by him and for this reason they were included in the Jewish Canon. From the Jews the book was taken over by the Early Christians who interpreted it allegorically as they did the other books of the Old Testament. But its pages had got jumbled up before the Jewish scribes took them over, so that it had ceased to be perfectly intelligible. This, together with its erotic Oriental imagery and supposed mystical significance presented in the superb Latin translation of St. Jerome, made it an exciting and stimulating subject for poets to draw on.

A good deal of Latin poetry of the Early Middle Ages is therefore derived from it. Some of this is secular love poetry, such as the famous *Iam Dulcis Amica* of the eleventh-century Cambridge Collection, but most of it is religious and allegorical. Thus, St. Peter Damian in the eleventh century wrote a beautiful poem in which the Bride represents the soul and the Bridegroom Christ. A twelfth-century pastoral written in dramatic form and beginning *Crebro de mihi basia* gives a different interpretation: here the still unborn Christ acts the part of the knight and the Virgin Mary that of the accosted maiden. And these poems have all a peculiar flavour: they are original poems, but they are built out of the material of other poems, composed in a far-off age and country. To feel them properly one must first have saturated oneself in the Biblical poetry that comes through them. Only thus will one catch the full richness of their overtones.

Now San Juan de la Cruz's *Cántico Espiritual* and *Noche Oscura* are to a certain extent poems of this sort. The subject of the *Cántico* is the quest of the soul for God, the mystical union and beatific vision and, since the poet regarded the *Song of Songs* as an allegory written by Solomon upon the same subject, it is natural that he should have drawn for his poem on the same verbal material, allowing Solomon's divinely inspired words to suffuse and saturate his. In fact he takes whole stanzas out of the Vulgate. But the fact that he was writing in Spanish—in which no translation of the *Song of Songs* was then known—made for a

more complete fusion of the old and new elements than had been possible to those poets who treated the same theme in Latin verse.

#### THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

It is fairly obvious that most of San Juan de la Cruz's poetry is autobiographical. Two of the major poems as well as the *villancico* *Aunque es de noche* are written in the first person singular. The third is in dialogue, but the character who represents the poet has the principal part. In fact both the *Cántico* and the *Noche Oscura* set out to describe certain spiritual adventures, which are told somewhat like a picaresque novel, in the form of a journey with stages or episodes. It is true that this YO or I stands for the soul and is therefore feminine, but there cannot be any doubt that the poet is describing—or representing rather—his own experiences.

What were these experiences? In the *Noche Oscura* there is an obvious allusion to his escape from prison, though at the moment of writing the poem this escape may only have been imagined or planned. But to stress this would be to misunderstand the poem entirely. San Juan's experiences were mystical experiences, which, as he tells us in his prose works, were devoid or almost devoid of sensory or imaginary impressions. They were experiences of which we, his readers, can have scarcely the remotest conception. If poetry is, as some think, a superior form of communication, we shall be at a loss, in this case, to say what is communicated.

But the question of what he was writing about also troubled San Juan. In the Prologue to the *Súbida del Monte Carmelo* he says of his mystical experience: 'Human knowledge is not sufficient to comprehend it nor human experience to describe it, because he who has passed through it will be able to feel it, but not to tell it'. And he wrote a *villancico* on this subject:

Entréme donde no supe,  
Y quedéme no sabiendo,  
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.

'I entered I knew not where and remained not knowing, passing beyond all knowledge.'

Indeed this sense of not understanding his own experience is one of San Juan's most recurrent themes. '*Era cosa tan secreta—Que me quedé balbuciendo.*' '*Y déjame muriendo—Un no sé qué que quedan balbuciendo.*' The verb *balbucir*, to stammer (in the sense of



children or people overcome by astonishment stammering), is a word that is frequently met in San Juan's writings: it belongs to that large family of expressions that we shall presently speak of which are grouped under the general heading of Dark Night.

But it is not only that the poet cannot understand or explain his own experience, he cannot fully understand or explain the poems that have come out of that experience either. 'It would be ignorance', he writes in the Prologue to the *Cántico*, 'to think that the sayings of love in mystical intelligence can be properly explained in any words whatsoever, because the Spirit of the Lord in us . . . begs on our behalf for what we ourselves cannot well comprehend or understand, so as to manifest it.' Now, although, as we shall see later, San Juan admits to using the conscious processes of an artist in composing his poems, this is a theory of inspiration in the most literal sense of that word. It implies that, whatever plans he may have made beforehand or corrections after, the actual work of poetry-making was done at the dictation of forces that he could not explain.

#### FUSION OF ELEMENTS

We have separated out from the text of San Juan de la Cruz's poems a number of different elements deriving from different sources. There is the popular element of the *Cancioneros* and of rural life: the influence, prosodic and pastoral, of Garcilaso and Renaissance Italy: the erotic and Oriental layer of the *Song of Songs*: and lastly his personal experiences. One must now ask how these are combined.

I would like at this point to draw attention to one of the most fundamental studies on the genesis of poetry that has ever been written—*The Road to Xanadu* by Professor Lowes. This book is an examination of two poems of Coleridge's—the *Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*. The fact that in writing these poems Coleridge's imagination was stimulated mainly by books and that his diaries give the titles of those that had most struck him during the preceding years, makes it possible to undertake a detailed study of their sources. And what Professor Lowes discovered was that the source of nearly every important word, image and episode in the poems lay not in one passage of his reading, but in several. To take a concrete case: Mount Abora in *Kubla Khan* was a composite word, drawn from three or four separate and distinct

recollections, which had been fused into one another. The water snakes in the *Ancient Mariner* were drawn from seven.

Now this is a process found by psycho-analysts to occur in dream symbolism. They call it condensation. The symbol, as one may term the result, acquires an extra force and potency when it contains fused together within it a number of different psychic elements. Though inexplicable in logical terms, it constitutes a sort of storehouse of unconscious meaning. Now, if the case of Coleridge can be taken as a general one, this is one of the principal things that poets do when they write poetry, and it is certainly what San Juan de la Cruz often did with his raw material. It is not possible to demonstrate this in quite such a complete way as Professor Lowes did in the case of the English poet, because San Juan did not draw all his impressions from his reading, but took some from his own experience. However, Sr. Alonso has been able to show that it is a regular feature of his poetry that elements from different literary sources are found fused together into a single passage or phrase.

Let me give a simple example of this. In stanza XXII of the *Cántico* beginning *En solo aquel cabello* we have an image of the Lover caught by the beauty of a single loose hair fluttering on the neck of the Beloved and then wounded by one of her eyes. Now there is a strong verbal resemblance between this passage and a famous sonnet by Garcilaso beginning

Y en tanto que el cabello que en la vena.

There can be no doubt that our poet had this sonnet at the back of his mind. But there is also a verse of the *Song of Songs* that, in the Vulgate translation, is even closer:

Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse:  
thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes,  
with one hair of thy neck.

And there are further a number of popular *villancicos* of the time, some of which the poet cannot fail to have heard, on the same theme.

One could give many other examples of this fusion of passages from Garcilaso and the *Song of Songs*. But if one wants a more complex instance of how San Juan de la Cruz combined materials from different sources, I think that the theme of the fountain, which plays such a notable part in his writings, will serve.

Let us start with the *villancico* that begins:

Que bien sé yo la fonte que mana y corre,  
Aunque es de noche.

The symbolism of the fountain in this poem is derived from two mystical writers, Francisco de Osuna and Bernadino de Laredo, who represented the Trinity under the triple symbol of fountain, river and sea. They were favourite writers of St. Teresa, and San Juan probably read them whilst acting as her confessor at Avila. In this poem he associates the fountain with his principal symbolic theme, the Dark Night, which I shall speak of later. But there is a popular element, too. The fact that he uses the antique Galician form *fonte* instead of the Castilian *fuelle* shows that he had in mind the famous romance, *Fonte-frida y con amor*, alluded to in his Commentary on the *Cántico*, which describes a fountain at which all the birds went to draw consolation. Only the Turtle dove, that unhappy widow, *que está viuda y con dolor*, did not go there, but practised instead a sort of mourner's mortification. Now the Turtle dove, *tortolica*, is the name which the Lover gives to his Beloved in a significant passage in the *Cántico*, following the authority of the *Song of Songs* and also, it seems, of a passage in Garcilaso. One can see why this romance struck the poet's imagination and also how complex are the interconnections of meaning binding together the images he used.

But in the *Cántico* there is an even more significant allusion to a fountain. At the end of her fruitless search, worn out by her sufferings, the Beloved comes to a 'crystal fountain' and gives vent to her longing that the eyes of her Lover, whom she has not been able to find, should be reflected in its 'silvered faces'. They are, and she is carried away by a *vuelo* or flight, which in the Commentary is explained as an *arrobamiento* or brief ecstasy. After this the Lover speaks to her and a new phrase of the poem begins.

What is the origin of this image? In Garcilaso's Second Eclogue the action takes place around a fountain which is something more than the usual fountain of pastoral poetry because, as Sr. Alonso says, it has an obsessive effect upon the three shepherds who converse by it. The poem begins with an invocation by the love-lorn Albanio to its clear waters, in which he sees, 'as if present, the memory of his beloved and how his joy in her was clouded and darkened when he lost her'. Later he explains this. The

Shepherdess he was in love with, but to whom he did not dare to declare his passion because she was a nymph of Diana, had asked him why he was always so sad.—Are you in love?—Yes—With whom?—Look in the fountain and you will see—She looked, saw her own reflection and left him. It is this scene that he relives whenever he looks into the clear waters, and in the end it drives him mad, so that he tries to drown himself. The other shepherds develop the water theme along less painful lines.

The difference between Garcilaso's use of the fountain and San Juan de la Cruz's is obvious. Sebastián de Córdoba brings them a little closer by making Albanio see in the water 'a diverse and varied story, which I could not understand'. It is this passage, no doubt, that led San Juan to interpret his fountain as Faith. But behind this fountain symbolism there is really a long story. The magic fountain of Crétien de Troyes and Arthurian legend had led to the *Fontaine d'Amors* of the *Roman de la Rose*, where the lover saw reflected the flower he wished to pick and, as he stretched out his hand, was shot by the archers. And in the folk lore of the time there is the magic fountain (sometimes converted into a magic mirror) in which the lover whose heart is pure can see the face of his mistress. A prose romance of the early sixteenth century, the *Caballero Platir*, contains an account of one of these. It is not unreasonable, I think, to suppose that Juan de la Cruz, during his childhood at Fontiveros (he probably took the name to mean True Fountain though it really means Iberian Fountain) had heard such a story and remembered it.

What do we learn from these examples? I think this. So far as his poetry was concerned, San Juan was practically a man of two books—the Bible and Garcilaso. They are combined and woven together in a quite astonishing way throughout his poems. But he also kept his ears very open to the popular love songs and legends of his time, and at the moment of composition fused them together with his recollections of book reading into something that represented the delights and torments of his mystical journey. In this process the popular-song element may well have provided the immediate stimulus. It will be remembered that it was a love song, heard through the walls of his prison, that set him off writing poetry. There is also the story of a nun at Beas, who at the Prioress's request sang him a song of religious love and grieving, and of his falling, in spite of his efforts to prevent it,

into an ecstasy. His sensitiveness to the singing voice was evidently remarkable.<sup>1</sup>

I believe then that we must imagine him, as he went about the streets with downcast eyes or ambled along the highways on his donkey, drinking in eagerly the love *coplas* and *villancicos* that he heard and interpreting them to himself *a lo divino*. There was nothing in itself very new about this—other pious people too were turning the popular muse to religious uses. But San Juan's passion for these ditties seems to have been exceptional. His poetry is full of allusions to them and, if so many had not been lost, we should probably recognize even more traces of them in his work than we do.

Finally I would like to draw attention to a rather different kind of evocation of the popular spirit. The *Cantico Espiritual* ends with the marvellous lines:

Y el cerco sosegaba,  
Y la caballería  
A vista de las aguas descendía.

Here there is no external source: the lines, if we exclude a faint allusion to the *Song of Songs*, are San Juan's own. They mean, we are told, that the passions of the soul have been assuaged and that the senses are descending to be purified in the divine waters. They thus mark the end of the long process of purgation and the reconciliation of the bodily senses with the soul in their union with God. What had been so painfully given up is restored again in a new and dazzling setting. And yet I do not think that in the whole of Spanish poetry there is a passage that calls up so vividly the Castilian-Andalusian scene: the line of horses or mules descending slowly to the river; the vague suggestion of frontier warfare, now over: that sense of endless repetition, of something that has been done countless times before being done again, which is the gift of Spain to the restless and progressive nations. In those last two wonderful lines with their gently reassuring fall, the horses

<sup>1</sup>He sometimes sang himself. A charming story tells of how one Christmas at Granada he took the infant Jesus in his arms and danced before the friars assembled for recreation, singing as he did so:

Mi dulce y tierno Jesus,  
Si amores me han de matar  
agora tienen lugar.

This was a popular love song of the time, to which San Juan added the first line.

descending within sight of the waters are lifted out of time and made the symbol of the peace of this Heracleitan land of eternal recurrence.

## DICTION

We have separated, as best we can, the different elements that go to make up San Juan de la Cruz's poetry and given some indication of how they were combined together. We must now, before going on to discuss the difficult question of the meanings, say something about the style or diction. To avoid prolixity, I shall confine myself to the *Noche Oscura* and the *Cántico*, which are, after all, the poems one reads twenty times to every once that one looks at the others.

What is the general impression that these poems make on us as we read them? The *Cántico* starts with a cry of longing and anguish, but almost at once this changes to an air-borne feeling of lightness, clarity, exhilaration, speed of movement. There is a sense of travel and adventure: mountains, rivers, valleys, dawns, breezes, 'strange islands' come and go: lions, antelopes, birds, flowers are seen and left behind. There are gusts of passion and tenderness and then the clear Castilian air grows heavy for a moment with the scent of cedar wood and lilies, whilst the lovers, in walled gardens or rocky caves or on castle battlements, meet together to perform their mysterious rites. Yet the voluptuousness which blows in from the East is tempered to an astonishing delicacy. This poetry is virginal; and there is at times a penetrating strangeness of tone that recalls—as very little poetry really recalls—the pathos of dreams.

There is another feature one cannot fail to notice—its distinctness. As each verbal impression is struck, another follows without blurring or overlap. The words are clear, clean, almost transparent, yet sufficiently full for their purpose: each phrase is perfectly articulated and the overtones are not allowed to interfere with one another. One is reminded of some Spanish guitar music.

What is the mechanism by which these effects are produced? Let us look first at the syntax. Sr. Alonso has pointed out the great place that the noun occupies in these poems. Verbs are reduced to the minimum. Sometimes a whole stanza passes without one. Other stanzas are interjections. In one the verbal form *is* is suppressed. Since it is verbs that diffuse the feeling-tone through the

sentence, their paucity helps to bring out the separate qualities of the substantives. Yet when the poet does accumulate verbs, what effects he attains! Take the last stanza of the *Noche Oscura*, depicting that moment in love which Donne has elaborated in his *Ecstasy*, when time seems arrested:

Quedéme, y olvidéme,  
El rostro recliné sobre el Amado,  
Cesó todo, y dejéme,  
Dejando mi cuidado,  
Entre las azucenas olvidado.

Here we see the sharp accented é's and ó's of the preterite tense (the é's higher in tone than any other sound in Spanish) acting as so many full stops to bring to an end the action of the love drama and prepare the way for the last phase of Nirvana-like abandonment.

Adjectives, too, are rare. Sr. Alonso, comparing the *Cántico* with Garcilaso's poem in the same type of stanza, has found that San Juan uses only one adjective for three used by the earlier poet. It is this, of course, that gives his poems their lightness and speed of movement: things pass by rapidly. But when he does use adjectives, he masses them:

Mi Amado, las montañas,  
Los valles solitarios nemorosos,  
Las ínsulas extrañas,  
Los ríos sonorosos,  
El silbo de los aires amorosos.  
La noche sosegada  
En par de los levantes de la aurora,  
La música callada,  
La soledad sonora,  
La cena, que recrea y enamora.

San Juan de la Cruz is a great coiner of images that can, as it were, be picked and stored in the mind without withering. In part this is due to his rhythmical mastery, in part to his powers of condensing different elements of feeling or thought into a single phrase, which thus acquires a symbolic value of its own. In the stanzas quoted above there are, I think, at least three instances of such unforgettable combinations. He frequently also writes lines that suggest by their sound the things they are describing—a proceeding much rarer in Spanish poetry than in



English. How expressive, for example, of haste is this line with its rustle of sibilants!

Pasó por estos sotos con presura.

Or, as Professor Alison Peers has pointed out, how well the idea of the ineffable lovers' union is suggested by the chain of deep vowels that culminate in the lines:

Amado con amada

Amada en el Amado transformada.

We need not multiply instances. Enough, I think, has been said to show that there is a density and complexity of allusion in these poems that prove the absurdity of supposing that San Juan de la Cruz was a merely 'inspired' poet who wrote his poems in ecstasies. A long period of preparation, both conscious and unconscious, preceded their composition, and if the ease and sureness with which they spring up show that many of them owe their birth to effortless moments, they were no doubt followed by careful correction and adjustment. Indeed, the poet has told us so himself. Asked by a nun whether the words of the *Cántico* had been 'given him by God', he replied, 'Sometimes God gave them to me and at other times I looked for them myself'. And one may note that the poem he wrote in an ecstasy, *Entréme donde no supe*, is not one of his better productions.

#### INTERPRETATIONS

San Juan de la Cruz's principal poems were written to express his mystical experiences. It follows, since we cannot form to ourselves any picture of these, that they are obscure. We shall not be able to go so far to meet them with our own experience as we can in the case of most other poetry. And, as we have already seen, San Juan himself found them difficult to understand. But there are different kinds of obscurity in poetry; let us therefore, though we cannot hope to 'interpret' these poems in any complete sense, try to see what sort of meanings can and cannot be got out of them. If this can be done without entering too far into the jargon of mysticism, we may perhaps find that we have learned to appreciate them better.

I think it will help us in attempting this if we first look at the plot of one of the poems. The *Cántico Espiritual* is the one that presents most difficulties, so I will start with a brief précis of it. That in itself will provide a preliminary elucidation.

The *Cántico* is written in the form of a dialogue between a

Lover and his Beloved. It starts with a cry of pain, in which the Beloved complains that her lover has wounded and then deserted her. Setting out to seek him, she inquires of the shepherds, the woods and the fields if they have seen him pass. They answer that he went by hurriedly, leaving them clothed in his beauty as he looked at them. She then, in another cry, recalling in its intensity an Andalusian *saeta*, complains once more of her abandonment, declares that everything in Nature reminds her of him, and begs him to show himself and kill her with his beauty. If only his eyes, she exclaims, could be reflected in that crystal fountain! The eyes appear and she is transported in an ecstasy.

The Lover now speaks, telling her that her transports have refreshed the wounded stag—that is himself. The Beloved answers him, saying (in the two wonderful stanzas I have just quoted) that her Lover is the mountains, valleys, strange islands, rivers, night, music, silence, refreshing feast and so forth.

Up to this moment the general drift of the poem has been clear enough, but from now on it becomes harder to follow. The action is slowed up and it is not easy to say at any given moment what point in the love story has been reached. San Juan was evidently aware of this, for in writing his prose commentary some years later, he altered the order of the next eighteen stanzas. The effect of the new arrangement is not so much, as M. Baruzi has said, to postpone the 'nuptials' (if by that word he means the consummation), as to allow the love-making that follows the 'espousals'—which is the point in the poem we have just reached—to develop more gradually and naturally. The alteration helps to clarify the action and therefore presumably the prose interpretation, but I agree with other critics that it does not improve the poem, because it spoils certain poetic effects. For this reason I shall follow here the original version.

To continue: the Beloved, in a passage full of reminiscences of the *Song of Songs*, describes the preparations for the nuptials. The marriage couch is ready, the bridegroom's procession is formed and the Lover leads her into his inner wine cellar (*in cellum vinarium* in the Vulgate) and gives her to drink: he takes her in his arms and teaches her a *ciencia muy sabrosa*. She promises to be his spouse and, going out into the fields, drunk with love, loses the sheep she had been tending. From now on, she declares, love will be her only trade. Some stanzas follow, describing how

the lovers employ themselves, and the Beloved then calls on the South Wind to blow through her garden, that her Lover may feed among its flowers.

The Lover then speaks, and his words denote that the consummation of the marriage has taken place. After an allusion to the apple tree where her mother (Eve) was lost, in the shade of whose wood (the Cross) he had betrothed himself to her, he conjures the birds, lions, stags, mountains, valleys, river banks, waters, airs and wakeful fears of night not to disturb his Beloved who is sleeping in his arms.

The Beloved in her turn then commands the 'nymphs of Judah' not to disturb them and makes an obscure request to her Lover. In two wonderful stanzas, full of echoes of Andalusian folk poetry and of the Bible, the Lover replies to her, announcing that the white dove has returned to her mate and made her nest alone with him in solitude.

After this the Beloved begs him to take her to see the hills and forests and the fountain of pure water by the light of his beauty, and to go deeper with her into the thickets and rocky caverns. There he must show her what she longs to see and give her 'what the other day he gave her'. The freshness of the breeze, the song of the nightingale, the charm of the poplar grove, the clear night. No one to see. Aminadab (the Enemy) away, the siege (passions of the soul) relaxed and the horsemen (the senses) descending to the waters (to be purified in them).

Such, then, is the plot of the *Cántico*. Its general intention is clear enough. We scarcely need the Argument, which the poet gives us at the beginning of his Commentary, to see that is an allegory representing the mystical journey of the soul to union with God. Let us see what this programme has to tell us. According to it, the first twelve stanzas represent the 'purgative stage' of the *via mística* and express the miseries and restlessness of the soul filled with an unsatisfied love for God. Then comes the 'illuminative stage', which begins with the appearance of the Lover's eyes in the water and contains the 'spiritual espousals'. This is followed by the 'united stage' (introduced in the second version by the line *Entrádose ha la Esposa*, and presumably so in the first version also) which starts, as one would expect, with the 'spiritual nuptials'. The last two stanzas represent the Beatific Vision, granted only to the perfect. Obviously the programme does not

fit the poem very well. The confusion over the espousals, only partly rectified in the second version, mars its inner logic. Nor is any place found in the poem for the very severe 'purgation of the spirit', which should accompany the 'illuminative stage'. In this respect neither the poem nor the programme fit the experience, as described at great length in two of the prose works. Although this discrepancy does not strictly concern us here, I point it out because it shows how far the poems are from being the systematic representations of the mystical experience which, as we shall see in a moment, San Juan himself tried to make them.

In comparison to the *Cántico*, the plot of the *Noche Oscura* is very simple. It, too, is an allegory describing the journey of the soul to union with God. The first four stanzas describe the 'purgative stage' (purgation both of the senses and of the spirit), and in the fifth we reach the 'nuptials' or state of union. The eighth and last stanza presumably represents the Beatific Vision, but the Commentary does not tell us this, because the two prose works that set out to interpret it break off at the end of the second stanza. The *Llama* is simpler still: it deals with particular experiences at the moment of union. But when one tries for any of these poems to press the allegorical interpretation, one is at once in difficulties. The details do not fit. Many passages are obscure, whilst others, if not exactly obscure, appear to contain a greater wealth of meanings than is required by the allegory.

Let us look, then, at the prose commentaries. Here, if anywhere, we ought to be able to discover what these hidden meanings are, for in them San Juan takes his poems and interprets them, line by line, at considerable length. Yet the result is disappointing. Although now and then we come on something that throws light on a passage, most of the poet's 'interpretations' drag down the text and destroy its radiations. It does not add, for example, to the significance of the line *Iré por esos montes y riberas* to know that the *montes*, being high, represent the virtues and the *riberas*, being low, mortifications and penances. Nor do we find it easy to believe that meanings of this sort were in the poet's mind at the time of his writing the poem. And, as we read on, we realize that the reason why San Juan's interpretations have the effect of mutilating the poems is that he is treating them down to their smallest details as allegories, in which every important word or image must have some precise concept that corresponds to it

and 'explains' it. But the very failure of his explanations proves to us what we had already guessed—that the poems are only allegorical in a very loose sense: their intimate structure is both deeper and more complex.

In fact, San Juan himself admits this. In his prologue to the prose *Cántico* he tells us that no gloss can fully interpret the stanzas and that we need not, therefore, feel bound to the explanation there offered. The *dichos de amor en abundante inteligencia mística*, inspired as they are by the spirit of the Lord, cannot be properly explained in words, any more than can the divine verses of the *Song of Solomon*. He feels before them the same thrilled surprise that other poets have felt on looking in the dead air of morning at their miraculous overnight productions. He feels this with particular force because he knows that these poems contain little ornament or incidental imagery; every word, every image, something tells him, has its roots deep in the soil, and is packed with significance. And then let us remember that in writing his commentaries he was not attempting a work of literary criticism. His aim was a series of guide books, for the use of a small circle of *almas enamoradas*, chiefly Carmelites, whom he was directing, which should instruct them on the various landmarks and hazards of the mystical road. It was merely as a matter of convenience that he wrote them in the form of commentaries on his own poems, instead of, as the Scholastic paraphrasers he was following had done in the past, in that of commentaries on the Scriptures. Whilst, therefore, we can learn much that will help us from these books, because they throw a light on the poet's mind and inner experience, we must not attempt to use them slavishly.

We said just now that these poems were allegories—but only in a loose and general sense. However, there is one strata of imagery that we can often say is strictly allegorical. These are the images taken from the *Song of Songs*. Let us consider San Juan's relation to this book for a moment. The representation of mystical experiences in erotic language has often shocked people in Northern countries. The love of God, they assert, can have nothing in common with sexual love. However this may be, I believe we may say that, but for the precedent given by the *Song of Songs*, Catholic mystics would never have dared—in the puritanical atmosphere of the Medieval Church—to take such an audacious step. It was this marvellous Eastern poem, with

its exotic, pagan overtones—interpreted, as it inevitably was, in a mystical sense—that opened a road of poetry in the harsh and tedious round of monastic life. It gave to imaginative monks and nuns the same sort of outlet from the depressing realities of their age that the lay-minded found in Ancient Greece and Rome. But for it, we can scarcely suppose that such a timidly orthodox man as San Juan de la Cruz would have ventured to explore the mysteries of ‘union’ or to write about them afterwards.<sup>1</sup>

It is not at all surprising, therefore, that he should have steeped himself in its imagery till it became almost part of himself. We must imagine him interpreting it and reinterpreting it to fit his mystical experiences, and can, I think, assume that before he began to compose his poems he had already fixed to his own private satisfaction exact meanings to some of its episodes and images. When, therefore, words taken from the *Song of Songs* appear in his poetry—and especially when their meaning in the context is obscure—one may expect to find that they had definite interpretations attached to them in his mind at the time of writing the poem and that these interpretations will be given in the Commentaries.

Let me give two examples. When we read in the Commentary that the ‘nymphs of Judah’ signify the ‘lower parts of the soul’, we can see that this is not an *a posteriori* explanation, but was more or less what the poet intended when he wrote the stanza. The same is true of the lovers’ marriage bed which was ‘enlaced with lions’ caves’. No one in those days could have thought of such a grotesque decoration unless the lions’ dens of the *Song of Songs* had already come to have a precise allegorical meaning for him, and it is a proof of his attachment to that meaning that he did not change *cuevas* to *cueros*, skins, which would have made the image more assimilable. One of the causes of the obscurity in the poems is, therefore, the way in which this foreign material, with private and factitious meanings attached to it, forces its

<sup>1</sup>Much has been written lately of the close parallel between the erotic mysticism of the Moslem *sufis* and that of San Juan de la Cruz. The reason for this is simply that both derive from the same source in Christian neoplatonism. Any question of Moslem influences on Catholic mysticism after the thirteenth century can be ruled out. In fact the only way in which the Moslem mystics could have influenced the Spanish clergy of the sixteenth century was through Ramon Lull’s *Blanquerna*, which was published in Spanish in 1521. But, as Professor Alison Peers has said, it passed unnoticed.

way into the text. In certain of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* a rather similar thing occurs: we are mystified, profitably or otherwise, by features whose presence we cannot explain, but which we realize are due to the interpolation of some private event known only to the poet, and not important enough to have been taken up into his regular mythology. Some of San Juan's images are just as private—using that word in the sense of something whose significance is not communicated to the reader. For when we look up those images of his that we do not understand in the prose dictionary he has provided, we come on a 'meaning', it is true, but one that, far from adding to our appreciation of the poem, actually diminishes it. Are these private, allegorical intrusions, therefore, to be regarded as blemishes?

The answer to that question is to read the poems again and see. We need, of course, before doing so, to be fairly familiar with the text of the *Song of Songs*. We shall then, I think, realize that one of the conditions necessary for the enjoyment of the poems is that we should not at every moment be asking ourselves what this or that line means. A vague general understanding is all that is necessary: within that the very uncertainty about the details helps to do the work.

But perhaps we can analyse the stream of our impressions as we read the *Cántico* and discover by what means it makes its effect on us. That will not be very easy to do, because we are now reaching the borderline of what can be distinctly understood and said. However, if we try, I suggest that the conclusions we arrive at may be something like this. We feel the images floating up to us with only vaguely intelligible connections and we realize that this is partly because they derive from an experience that lies too far beyond our experience for us to be able to reconstruct it, but still more because many of them recall a text which has great emotive force of its own and which is being interpreted in some only partly comprehended manner. Then, if we are further attentive to what is happening, we will see that this breaking of the surface coherence, together with the continual, as one might say, inverted *double entendre* (erotic language interpreted in a 'higher' sense) sets free the words from their normal associations, restores to them a kind of virginity and, at the same time, gives them that rare property known in chemistry as *nascency*, of being able to form new associations, of a kind which otherwise they



would not have been capable of.<sup>1</sup> Thus one finds that words like breeze, groves, solitude, water, mountains, islands, silence, amber, and night shed some of the incrustations of their vulgar uses, turn into the platonic ideas of themselves, and so acquire that sort of immediacy and indifference to actual conditions that one expects only from music.

Note the fact of their 'purification' in a platonic sense. The new associations that the words are given are not, as one might say, horizontal ones: they do not, as in metaphysical or Baroque poetry, result in the fusion of two previously separate objects or modes of feeling. They lead down rather into the depths of the poem where they make their own obscure contacts among one another, and the result is that when the words strike our ear they seem purer and more diaphanous, and changed, as it were, into the essences of themselves. Now this is not a property of obscure poetry in general. It accords, on the contrary, with the more or less conscious aim of much Renaissance poetry to purify the imagery of all-too-particular references to actual life, just as it purified and amplified the diction.<sup>1</sup> One may find many examples of this in Milton's poetry, especially, I think, from the seventh book of *Paradise Lost* onwards. In his case this was achieved in part through allusions to deeply felt texts in the Bible and classics, which modified the sharpness and actuality of the associations by interposing between them and the outside world another set of references, but mainly by rhythmical means. As the blind poet lost contact with the visual world, his auditory imagination increased and his imagery became 'purified' in a Platonic sense, so that it, too, seemed to contribute to the music. In the same way one is tempted to think that San Juan de la Cruz's practice of detachment from the world and mortification

<sup>1</sup> Let me make this comparison clearer. When a molecule of gas is broken up, its liberated atoms are able, during a short period of time, to form combinations with atoms of other elements which normally would not combine with them. They are then said to be in a 'nascent condition'. In the same way, when the sense tension of a poem is broken, its particles will sometimes acquire a peculiar susceptibility, which will lead them to form new and more or less secret liaisons that under ordinary circumstances would have been forbidden them. It goes without saying that these liaisons must first of all have been prepared in the deeper part of the poet's mind. In fact, it will usually have been his strong desire—amounting to an inner compulsion—to bring them about that will have led him to break the formal marriage ties of sense, and give scope to the new adventures.

of the senses was communicated to his poetry and helped to produce these effects that we have noticed.

But there is nothing thin or vaporous in this purified imagery of his. Its energy is sustained by that process of 'condensation' we have described a few pages back which supplies a close web of hidden tissue linking all his words and images together. Although we are not consciously aware of its ramifications as we read, it provides the inner consistency we feel and also the extraordinary intensity. Few of the words in San Juan's poetry are accidental or ornamental. Almost every one has been deeply fed and nourished from the poet's psychic stores, and that is why, carried up to us as they are by his very personal rhythms, they move us. That *intima viveza*, which he declared was a quality of his mystical experiences, is after all communicated in some sense to us.

Finally, do not let us forget the great effects produced in the major poems by the incessant allusions to another poetic text. The *Song of Songs* provides the *Cántico* with a continual reinforcement. Its cavalry does not all have to be brought into action, for the reader knows that they are there and the appearance of a single horseman will have the effect of a company. I can give a slight example of this from my own experience. During the many years that I have known the *Cántico* I have always associated the centre part of it in my mind with lilies and the perfume of lilies, and I firmly believed that they were mentioned in it. Yet they are not. I had interpreted San Juan's vague *flores* in the light of the many lily passages in the *Song of Songs* and of the *azucenas* in the *Noche Oscura*. And when today I read accounts of this poem describing its sensual, luxuriant imagery, I see that the writers of these accounts have fallen into the same mistake. For in the *Cántico* everything is pure and delicate—most of all the acts of the lovers. But the constant allusions to the *Song of Songs* make one feel the breath of that intoxicating poem, which is even more richly coloured in Latin than in English, blowing through the clear Castilian *montes* and *sotos*.

This, I think, is one of the things that makes the poems of San Juan de la Cruz unique in literature. The merest glance shows their striking originality. Yet every second word is derived from some other literary source—often from a 'condensation' of two or three different passages at the same time—whilst the number of sources from which the poet drew is surprisingly limited. The

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text that he used most fully and consciously was, as we have said, the *Song of Songs*. Here the sense one gets of the poem rising out of another poetic plane, which provides it with a penumbra of half-caught meanings, adds to the beauty and complexity. So far as I know there is nothing else quite like this in literature. You do not feel Homer's long lines reverberating behind the *Æneid*, however great Virgil's dependence on him may have been. And though Milton's poetry is saturated in classical and Biblical reminiscences, it is rarely, I think, the particular text that he recalls, but only—and that as a rule but vaguely—the general story or atmosphere. The *Waste Land* may seem to contradict this, yet I doubt whether the dead poets summoned by Mr. Eliot's incantations really reinforce his poem in the way that the *Song of Songs* does the *Cántico*, though they add to its wit. Their range of allusion is too wide, their selection has been too conscious and deliberate.

Yet there is a parallel I should like to draw because I believe it will help us to place this Tristan da Cunha of poets in his proper setting and to relate him to the other island peaks in the seas of poetry. We have already spoken of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. The reader will have observed the features it shares with the *Cántico Espiritual*—the compelling rhythm and the high degree of unconscious 'condensation'. But there are other resemblances. If the subject of the *Cántico* is the progress of the Catholic mystic towards 'union', that of the *Ancient Mariner* is sin and redemption, with final salvation obtained after a life of penance. Now San Juan, we know, is the Beloved of his poems. Is it too much to suggest that the *Ancient Mariner* may be a symbol of Coleridge himself, condemned for a mysterious offence to wander restlessly through the world, inflicting boredom on everyone he meets and wasting his talents through the expiatory compulsion he feels to pour them out chaotically and indiscriminately? If this is so, we must suppose that the fatal conflicts that underlay his character and which were so soon to ruin his life and poetry had found the means of dramatizing themselves, before they became too apparent to the world, in a kind of spiritual autobiography: in the imaginary case-history of a man who suffered, as Coleridge did, from compulsion manias.

Without insisting on this, however, we can say that the plots of the two poems have one striking resemblance. They are both

about salvation through love. The Ancient Mariner is saved from total damnation by a sudden rush of love for created things. And what things! Water snakes! The verse that describes this is the climax of the poem and leads to the Albatross falling from his neck and the long work of purgation beginning. Now look at the *Cántico*. It is true that love for created things plays only a subsidiary part in the action, but that is because it is describing a more advanced stage. Such love serves merely to raise the mind of the chief character towards their Source. But love for this Source is the dynamic of the poem, and this is an attitude with which Coleridge (he was reading Spinoza at the time) would have fully agreed. Only in the *Ancient Mariner* he was telling a story of sin and redemption and penance that ends more or less where San Juan's story begins. The moral of the poem 'He prayeth best who loveth best' would serve also as a moral for the *Cántico*.

But whatever we think of this argument, which there is no space to do more than sketch out here, there can be no doubt that the *Ancient Mariner*, like San Juan's poem, sprang from a very deep level in the poet's mind. This is shown firstly by the new and penetrating rhythm (the more penetrating the rhythm, the deeper the seat of the disturbance that set it in movement), then by the great use of 'condensation', and thirdly by the symbolic nature of the imagery. Arctic and tropical seascapes had evidently a special significance for Coleridge that went far beyond their general scenic effects, as can be told from the concrete form in which they are presented. One has only to compare the language of this poem with that of *Frost at Midnight*, written at this time, or the *Ode to Dejection*, written two years later, to see that an entirely different kind of psychic process was at work in its making. A process which, as we have shown, had much in common with that which produced the *Cántico Espiritual*.

The circumstances of their composition were also similar. Both were written, after a long period of unconscious gestation, under a sudden and violent stimulus. In each case the poetic period lasted a short time only and was never repeated—for, if Coleridge wrote other poems after 1798, he wrote none in which the 'shaping spirit of the imagination', as he called it to distinguish it from the 'combining power of fancy', played a part. In each case the results were poems of symbolic rather than

descriptive imagery, rooted by ways that we can only guess at in the deepest layers of the poet's mind.

We have now arrived at the point I have been aiming at in making this comparison—which is that the structure of poems such as the *Cántico* and the *Ancient Mariner* is characteristic of a rare type of poetic discharge, in which the poet throws in all he has and then dies because he has exhausted the stock of the very intimate things he had to say. Not only has he exhausted it, but the psychic process by which this discharge is achieved, and which required an unusual combination of circumstances to set it off, cannot be repeated except after a long interval. Another case is Rimbaud's *Saison en Enfer*, though here the method of composition was different because Rimbaud drew on the events of his own life rather than on his reading and expressed them by a process of transmutation of imagery which he invented when writing his *Illuminations*. (For disguise when writing about certain matters is necessary.) The distinctive thing about this class of poets is that they write from so deep a level, about things so essential to their inner nature, with so little dilution of secondary material that: (1) their rhythms have an unusual penetrative power; (2) their imagery is symbolic; and (3) they exhaust themselves. In any attempt to classify poetry psychologically—that is by the kind of process by which it is produced—these meteoric poets will demand a special section.

#### THE THEMES

San Juan de la Cruz's poetry springs from his experience as a practising mystic. This is a region very remote from our experience today and one of which I am quite unqualified to speak. But there are two themes in his poetry which are, I think, more approachable. One of them is his attitude to Nature, and the other is his great symbolic conception of the Dark Night. Although the latter is bound up with his mystical experience, its fringes descend to the ordinary world and are therefore to some extent palpable to us. And the number of feelings and images that gather round it make it the most important and characteristic thing in his writings.

The Nature passages to which I would like to draw attention occur in the first fifteen stanzas of the *Cántico*. They contain a sort of philosophy of Nature, which was, I think, first suggested

to him by a chapter in St. Augustine's Confessions (Book IV, 10), where he speaks of the beauty of all created things coming from God. This was amplified by the Thomist view, quoted by San Juan, according to which the creatures are 'substantially' united to God, because he created them. That is to say, the ideas expressed here by San Juan are not new: it is the use he made of them in his poetry that interests us.

Let us look at the poem. The forsaken soul is searching for her Lover. She sees the woods and thickets, the flowers and fields which he has planted. In lines of wonderful tenderness

Oh bosques ye espesuras,  
Plantadas por la mano del Amado

she implores them to tell her where he has gone, and they reply that he passed by in haste, leaving them clothed with his beauty as he looked at them. In haste, because they belong to the lower orders of Creation. A glance was sufficient to stamp his image on them. But their beauty continues to remind her of his greater beauty. It wounds her, and, more than that, there is *un no sé qué*—a something, she cannot say what—that they go on murmuring, which kills her.

Then a little further on the 'Spiritual Betrothal' is announced by the Beloved in two rapturous stanzas which assert that her Lover is the mountains, valleys, rivers, islands, music, night, etc. This surprisingly pantheistic statement receives only the bald comment that 'these mountains are my lover for me'. But San Juan's orthodoxy cannot be questioned. The Beloved here is anticipating the state of the union and Beatific Vision represented in the later stanzas of the *Cántico* when the soul, purified of all sin, sees the whole of Creation flooded with God's presence. As in Dante's *Paradiso*, the poet's powers of apprehending beauty increase as he approaches the source of it.

In his prose Commentary San Juan has done his best to spoil these passages for us by telling us that the groves, woods, flowers and so forth, signify the Virtues, Elements, and Angels. He is here, of course, following those barbarously rationalizing tendencies of the early centuries of Christianity (that have their counterpart in the utilitarian tendencies of today) by which everything in the visible world must owe its virtue to being the symbol of some invisible higher entity. But in one case this passion

for interpretation has added something to the poetry. Every reader will have paused over those *insulas extrañas*, 'strange islands', which occur twice in the poem. Clearly they are an allusion to the newly discovered islands in the Indies. But San Juan adds more: they represent also those states, categories and modes of being that are comprehended in the nature of God—but are unknown to men. I think we may say that this meaning was almost certainly in the poet's mind at the time of his writing the line. San Juan, like Spinoza, was deeply impressed by the infinite range of the possibilities of being that are contained in the Divine Essence. In one place he remarks that those who knew God best—by which he means the angels and blessed souls in Heaven—were precisely those who knew how little they really know of Him. And in the last stanzas of the *Cántico* we find the soul in union with God asking to be taken further into his presence and shown new marvels and mysteries of the Divine Wisdom. San Juan's often-expressed repugnance for the vulgar type of 'supernatural revelation' or, indeed, for any *noticia* or communication that was not imageless and wordless, shows that no superstitious meaning should be attached to this passage. His aim in desiring further 'communications' was simply to draw closer, *más adentro*, to the object of his search.

In the *Dark Night* we come to the deepest and most comprehensive of San Juan de la Cruz's symbolic themes. It is characteristic that he took the term from a not very striking passage in Garcilaso. In his Second Eclogue the despairing lover Albanio goes out to seek death:

... mi cruda suerte  
hizo que de mi choza me saliese  
por el silencio de la noche oscura.

Compare this with the opening stanzas of the *Noche Oscura*, where the soul goes out to seek union, which also implies death to this world:

En una noche oscura  
Con ansias en amores inflamada,  
Oh dichosa ventura!  
Salt sin ser notada,  
Estando ya mi casa sosegada.

As one can see, six of the words in these five lines correspond in



form or meaning to six of the words in Garcilaso's, whilst the second line in San Juan's stanza perfectly represents the state in which Albanio left his hut. Moreover *ventura* occurs two lines further on in Garcilaso's poem, where it rhymes with *oscura*.

The *Song of Songs* has also a significant nocturnal passage. 'By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him and I found him not.' And this search leads the Shulammitte maiden out into the streets till at last she finds him and brings him home. Two chapters further on there is another passage of the same kind—what folklorists call a double—which is even more poignant. She dreams that she hears her love knocking on the door, wakes to find that he has gone, and hurries out after him. One can see how these passages from the most thrilling of all love poems must have affected the poet as he lay in the darkness of his prison cell, where, it will be remembered, he was writing another poem on night. In his Commentary in the *Súbida* he speaks of this stanza I have quoted as representing an escape from prison.

But what exactly was San Juan's conception of the Dark Night? To explain this we must go to the starting point of his mystical philosophy. In the *Súbida del Monte Carmelo*, where one finds the best account of this, he lays it down as an axiom that, compared with the infinite being of God, all the being of the creatures is *nothing*. From this it follows that those who put their affections on them are nothing, and less than nothing, also. Man can only be *something* by allowing God, who alone has real existence, to fill him; but for this to happen, he must first have emptied himself of every attachment to the creatures. Two contraries cannot exist together in the same person, said Aristotle, and so, if the choice is to be God, the senses, imagination, understanding, memory and will must all be torn up and uprooted from their ordinary functions. It is this process of tearing up, known as purgation, which is the first meaning given to the term 'Dark Night'. For as night is a deprivation of light, so the deprivation of its faculties can be called night to the soul.

In an impressive doggerel (*Súbida I*, 13) he has expressed the antithesis between *todo*, everything, and *nada*, nothing, that lies at the root of his thinking and feeling.

Para venir a gustarlo todo,  
no quieras tener gusto en nada.

Para venir a poseerlo todo,  
 no quieras poseer algo en nada.  
 Para venir a serlo todo,  
 no quieras ser algo en nada.  
 Para venir a saberlo todo,  
 no quieras saber algo en nada.

And he goes on to say that to get what one wants, one must go by what one does not want; and to get to what one is, one must go by what one is not.

'Less than all cannot satisfy man,' said William Blake, and to obtain all Fray Juan de la Cruz was prepared to follow the road of renunciation and mortification, as prescribed by the teaching of his day, to the end. For him no compromise was possible, and the account he has given in his best-known book, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, of the trials and sufferings experienced during the period of purgation, has helped, even among Catholics, to throw a harsh and forbidding light on his character. Both William James and Huysmans, for example, speak of him with horror as a sort of fakir.

Yet without seeking in any way to attenuate the severity of the course he prescribed or the enormous, obsessionary nature of his whole undertaking, we should note that there is nothing punitive in San Juan's ascesis. He did not hate the world and the senses, as so many religious people have done, but sought rather to escape from them and leave them behind him. His career, therefore, appears less as a struggle than a flight—a vertiginous ascent away from everything and towards God. *Hay almas*, he says, *que vuelan como las aves que en el aire se purifican y limpian*. And in one of his later poems he compares the soul to a hawk flying at a heron:

Y fuí tan alto, tan ato  
 Que le di a la caza alcance,

But one can only rise by throwing off ballast. And so the first series of images associated with the Dark Night are those that express deprivation. Solitude, silence, *desnudez*, poverty, emptiness, forgetfulness, detachment from self and from all things. These words have no painful associations. The sufferings of the Dark Night, especially in its second spiritual phase, come from

the sense of unsatisfied love, mixed with self doubts and the fear of abandonment, which increase as the state of union draws near. They are the reverse side of that love, corresponding to what jealousy is to ordinary lovers. The work of purgation, on the other hand, gives peace. In it 'the soul finds its rest and quietude because, since it desires nothing, nothing fatigues it and, since it is in the centre of its humility, nothing can oppress it'. This night is *pacífica, dichosa*. And that is why, throughout his prose works, the words peace, solitude, emptiness, ignorance, forgetfulness and all the rest of that long series have an aura of happy and soothing connotations. Like Mallarmé, San Juan is the poet of the minus sign.

But the theme or symbol of the *Dark Night* has other meanings than those associated with the purgative process. It also signifies Faith. Now Faith is the intellectual aspect of the triple instinct that leads the soul towards God, but it is dark because to the mind it is inexplicable. And the end of the polar journey, where the compass needle points downwards—that is to say, God—is also inexplicable. He, too, therefore (borrowing a phrase from Dionysius the Areopagite), is 'dark night to the soul in this life'. San Juan uses the simile of a moth and a bat to explain this; their eyes being adjusted to the twilight, they cannot see when the light becomes too great. Thus the sun or a lamp can be said to look dark to them, because it makes their sense organs useless. In the same way God will appear dark to the human intelligence, because it lacks the organs to apprehend Him. It is here that the purgation of the intellect comes in. Being useless for the purpose, it must be discarded and new organs developed in its place. Whilst this is happening, the soul lives in a double obscurity, without either its new faculties or its old. Night has delivered it from the anarchy of apparent existence, and there has seeped in from the deep darkness around an obscure apprehension of the true.

But the *Dark Night* will not be properly understood unless it is felt to represent a state that precedes and heralds the day. A note of suppressed excitement and exhilaration rustles under the surface, recalling, in a quieter key, the thrilling tones of Donne's poem on his sickness. *Este noche*, San Juan says, *encubridora de las esperanzas de la luz del día*—'This night, accomplice of the hopes of the light of day'. And although the two greatest of his prose

works describe the Night, with its hushed suspense and its sharp stabs of longing, it is chiefly the coming of Day that the lyrics celebrate. The poet, emerging from the dim states that precede the ecstasy of composition, finds in the marvellous illumination of that ecstasy his best subject-matter. The poems are the explosions of a man whose ordinary condition had up till then been, if not *noche oscura*, then twilight.

The end of the night meant the satisfaction of the longings that had carried him forward—the final accomplishment of the work of love. ‘To this end of love’, he says, ‘we were created.’ ‘The one means by which the Soul and all its faculties is moved is love.’ It is here that one is struck by the difference from such modern mystics as Aldous Huxley. In all San Juan’s books there is not a single word of disparagement, either for other people or for those human senses and faculties which he had felt it necessary to purge. But love for a Catholic mystic meant first of all love for God, because that embraced everything else. Such love could not be satisfied by anything short of ‘union’. But what is union? It seems, a stage of great aloofness punctuated by trance or ecstasy, in which the moral values wither away because they have become useless and the æsthetic ones take their place.<sup>1</sup> As in earthly love unions—but here we return to allegory—the Lovers become two mirrors reflecting one another’s beauty. Or so San Juan describes it, commenting the line of the *Cántico*, *Y vámonos a ver en tu hermosura*.

‘So I shall see thee in thy beauty, and thou shalt see me in thy beauty, and I shall see myself in thee in thy beauty and thou shalt see me in thyself in thy beauty and thou shalt see thyself in me in thy beauty; and so I shall appear to be thee in thy beauty and thou shalt appear to be me in thy beauty and my beauty will be thy beauty and thy beauty my beauty; and so I shall be thee in thy beauty and thou shalt be me in thy beauty; because thine own beauty will be my beauty and so we shall see one another in thy beauty.’

For beauty is the flowering of love. *A la tarde te examinarán en el amor*.

<sup>1</sup> In Chapter XXVI of the *Cántico* San Juan says that the soul in union returns in a certain sense to the innocence of Adam and can no longer distinguish between good and evil. If his works had not been expurgated, we might learn more upon this dangerous topic, so redolent of the ‘heresy of the *Iluminados*’.

PAUL BOWLES

# UNDER THE SKY

INLAND from the sea on the dry coastal plain lay the town, open, spread out under the huge, high sky. People who lived outside in the country, and even some of the more educated town-dwellers, called the town 'the Inferno' because nowhere in the region was the heat so intense. No other place around was quite so shadowless and so dusty; it seemed that the clouds above shrank upwards to their farthest possible positions. Many miles above, and to all sides, they hung there in their massive patterns, remote, and motionless. In the Spring, during the nights, the lightning constantly jumped from one cloud to another, revealing unexpected distances between them. Then, if anyone ever looked at the sky, he was surprised to see how each flash revealed a seemingly more-distant portion of the heavens to which still more clouds had receded. But people in the town seldom turned their heads upward. They knew at what time of the year the rains would come, and it was unnecessary to scan those vast regions in order to say what day that would be. When the wind had blown hard for two weeks so that the dust filled the wide empty streets, and the lightning grew brighter each night until finally there was a little thunder, they could be sure the water would soon fall.

Once a year, when the lightning was in the sky, Jacinto left his village in the mountains and walked down to the town, carrying with him all the things his family had made since his last trip. There were two days of walking in the sierra where it was cool; the third day the road was through the hot lands, and this was the day he preferred, because the road was flat and he could walk faster and leave the others behind. He was taller and prouder than they, and he refused to bend over in order to be able to trot uphill and downhill as they did. In the mountains he laboured to keep up with them, but on the plain he strode powerfully ahead and sometimes arrived at the market before sunset.

Now he stood in the public square with a small paper parcel in his hand. He had arrived the day before. Instead of sitting in the sidestreet near the fountain and discussing the sales with the

others from his village, he walked into the municipal garden and sat down on a concrete bench marked '1936'. He looked up and down the walk. No one paid him any attention. He was barefoot, so the shoeshine boys passed him by.

Tearing open the paper packet he emptied the dried leaves into his left hand. With his right he picked out all the little round, black berries and tossed them away. Then he crushed the leaves and slowly rolled them into five thin cigarettes. This took all his attention for a half-hour.

A voice beside him said: 'That's pretty'.

He looked up. It was a town dweller; he had never seen him before, so he did not answer.

'All for you?' said the other, in the silken town voice that Jacinto had learned to distrust.

'I bought it. I made them,' said Jacinto.

'But I like *grifas* too,' smiled the stranger. He was poorly dressed and had black teeth.

Jacinto covered the cigarettes completely with one big hand which he placed on the seat of the bench. The stranger pointed to a soldier sleeping on a bench near the iron bandstand.

'He wants one, and I want one. You should be more careful. It's three months now for possessing marijuana. Don't you know?'

'No,' said Jacinto, 'I don't know.' Then he slowly handed over two of the cigarettes. The man took them.

'So long,' he said.

Jacinto stood up full of fury, and with the other three cigarettes still in his hand, he walked out into the plaza and down the long street that led to the station. It was nearly time for the daily train from the north. Sometimes crazy people got off, who would give a man enough money for two good meals, just for carrying a bundle into the town for them. There was a cemetery behind the roundhouse where some of the railroad employees went to smoke the weed. He remembered it from the preceding year; he had met an inspector there who had taken him to see a girl. She had proved to be ugly—one side of her face was mottled with blue and purple.

At the station the train had already arrived. The people trying to get on were fighting with those who were trying to get off. He wondered why with all those open windows everyone insisted on going through the two little doors at the ends of the

cars. It would have been very simple that way, but these people were too stupid to think of it. His defeat at the hands of the townsman still bothered him; he wanted to have a gun so he could pull it out and shout: 'I am the father of all of you!' But it was not likely that he ever would have a gun.

Without approaching the platform where so many people were moving about, he stood and impassively watched the confusion. From the crowd three strange-looking people suddenly emerged. They all had very white skin and yellow hair. He knew, of course, that they were from a far-away place because everyone knew that when people looked as strange as that they were from the capital or even farther. There were two women and one man, and as they approached him, he noticed that they were speaking a language which only they could understand. Each one carried a leather bag covered with small squares of coloured paper stuck on at different angles. He stepped back, keeping his eyes on the face of the younger woman. He could not be sure whether he found her beautiful or revolting. Still, he continued to look at her as she passed, holding on to the man's arm. The other woman noticed him, and smiled faintly as she went by.

He turned angrily and walked towards the tracks. He was angry at her stupidity—for thinking he could have enough money to pay her as much as she would surely want. He walked on until he came to the cemetery. It was empty save for the grey lizards that scurried from the path at his feet. In the farthest corner there was a small square building with a white stone woman on top. He sat in the shade of the little building and took out his cigarettes.

The train whistled; it was starting on its trip to the sea where the people eat nothing but fish and travel on top of the water. He drew in the first few breaths very slowly and deliberately, holding the smoke in his lungs until he felt it burning the edges of his soul. After a few minutes the feeling began to take shape. From the back of his head it moved down to his shoulders. It was as if he were wearing a tight metal garment. At that instant he looked at the sky and saw far above him the tiny black dots that were vultures, moving ever so slowly in circles as they surveyed the plain in the afternoon sunlight. Beyond them stood the clouds, deep and monumental. 'Ay!' he sighed, shutting his eyes, and it occurred to him that this was what the dead people, who were



lying on all sides of him, looked at day after day. This was all they could see—the clouds, and the vultures, of which they need have no fear, hidden safely as they were, deep in holy ground.

He continued to smoke, going deeper and deeper into delight. Finally he lay back and murmured: 'Now I am dead, too.' When he opened his eyes it was still the same day, and the sun was very low in the sky. Some men were talking nearby. He listened; they were trainmen come to smoke, discussing wages and the prices of meals. He did not believe any of the figures they so casually mentioned. They were lying to impress one another, and they did not even believe each other. He smoked half of the second cigarette, rose, stretched, and jumped over the cemetery wall, going back to the station by a roundabout path in order not to have to speak to the trainmen. Those people, when they smoked, always wanted more and more company; they would never let a fellow-smoker go quietly on his way.

He went to the cantina by the station, and standing in the street, watched the railway employees playing billiards inside. As night approached, the lightning became increasingly visible. He walked up the long street toward the centre of town. Men were playing marimbas in the doorways and in front of the houses—three or four together, and sometimes only one, indolently. The marimbas and the marijuana were the only good things in the town, reflected Jacinto. The women were ugly and dirty, and the men were all thieves and drunkards. He remembered the three people at the station. They would be in the hotel opposite the plaza. He walked a little faster, and his eyes, bloodshot from lack of sleep and too much of the drug, opened a bit wider.

After he had eaten heartily in the market, sitting by the edge of the fountain, he felt very well. By the side-wall of the cathedral were all the families from the mountains, some already asleep, the others preparing for the night. Almost all the stalls in the market were dark; a few figures still stood in front of the cold fruit-juice stand. Jacinto felt in his pocket for the stub and the whole cigarette, and keeping his fingers around them, walked across to the park. The celestial fireworks were very bright, but there was no thunder. Throughout the town sounded the clink and purr of the marimbas, some near and some far away. A soft breeze stirred the branches of the few lemon trees in the park.

He walked along thoughtfully until he came to a bench directly opposite the entrance of the hotel, and there he sat down and brazenly began to smoke his stub. After a few minutes it was easier for him to believe that one of the two yellow-haired women would come out. He flicked away the butt, leaned back and stared straight at the hotel. The manager had put a square loud-speaker over the entrance door, and out of it now came a great crackling and hissing that covered the sound of the marimbas. Occasionally a few loud notes of band music rose above the chaos, and from time to time there seemed to be a man's voice speaking behind the noise. Jacinto was annoyed: the women would want to stay inside where they could hear the sound better.

A long time went by. The radio was silenced. The few voices in the park disappeared down the streets. By the cathedral everyone was asleep. Even the marimbas seemed to have stopped, but when the breeze occasionally was more active, it brought with it, swelling and dying, long marimba trills from a distant part of the town.

It grew very late. There was no sound but the lemon leaves rubbing together and the jet of water splashing into the basin in the centre of the market. Jacinto was used to waiting. And halfway through the night a woman stepped out of the hotel, stood for a moment looking at the sky, and walked across the street to the park. From his bench in the dark he watched her as she approached. In the lightning he saw that it was not the younger one. He was disappointed. She looked upward again before moving into the shade of the lemon trees, and in a moment she sat down on the next bench and lighted a cigarette. He waited a while. Then he said: 'Señorita'.

The yellow-haired woman cried: 'Oh!' She had not seen him. She jumped up and stood still, peering toward his bench.

He moved to the far-end of the seat and calmly repeated the word: 'Señorita'.

She walked uncertainly toward him, still peering. He knew this was a ruse. She could see him quite clearly each second or so, whenever the sky lighted up. When she was near enough to the bench, he motioned for her to sit down beside him. As he had suspected, she spoke his tongue.

'What is it?' she asked. The talk in the strange language at the station had only been for show, after all.

'Sit down, señorita.'

'Why?'

'Because I tell you to.'

She laughed and threw away her cigarette.

'That's not a reason,' she said, sitting down at the other end of the bench. 'What are you doing here so late?' She spoke carefully and correctly, like a priest. He answered this by saying: 'And you, what are you looking for?'

'Nothing.'

'Yes. You are looking for something,' he said solemnly.

'I was not sleeping. It is very hot.'

'No. It is not hot,' said Jacinto. He was feeling increasingly sure of himself, and he drew out the last cigarette and began to smoke it. 'What are you doing here in this town?' he asked her after a moment.

'Passing on my way south to the border,' she said, and she told him how she was travelling with two friends, a husband and wife, and how she often took a walk when they had gone to bed.

Jacinto listened as he drew in the smoke and breathed it out. Suddenly he jumped up. Touching her arm, he said: 'Come to the market.'

She arose, asking: 'Why?' and walked with him across the park. When they were in the street, he took her wrist fiercely and pressing it, said between his teeth: 'Look at the sky.'

She looked up wonderingly, a little fearfully. He went on in a low, intense voice: 'As God is my witness, I am going into the hotel and kill the man who came here with you'.

Her eyes grew large. She tried to wrest her arm away, but he would not let it go, and he thrust his face into hers. 'I have a pistol in my pocket and I am going to kill that man.'

'But why?' she whispered weakly, looking up and down the empty street.

'I want his wife.'

The woman said: 'It is not possible. She would scream.'

'I know the proprietor,' said Jacinto, rolling his eyes and grinning. The woman seemed to believe him. Now he felt that a great thing was about to happen.

'And you,' he said, twisting her arm brutally, 'you do not scream.'

'No.'

Again he pointed to the sky.

'God is my witness. You can save the life of your friend. Come with me.'

She was trembling violently, but as they stumbled through the street, and he let go of her an instant, she began to run. With one bound he had overtaken her, and he made her stop and look at the sky again as he went through his threats once more. She saw his wide, red-veined eyes in a bright flash of lightning, and his utterly empty face. Mechanically she allowed him to push her along through the streets. He did not let go of her again.

'You are saving your friend's life,' he said. 'God will reward you.'

She was sobbing as she went along. No one passed them as they moved, unsteadily, on toward the station. When they were nearly there they made a great detour, past the edge of the town, and finally they came to the cemetery.

'This is a holy place,' he murmured, swiftly crossing himself. 'Here you are going to save your friend's life.'

He took off his shirt, laid it on the stony ground, and pushed her down. There was nothing but the insistent, silent flashing in the sky. She kept her eyes shut, but she shuddered at each flash, even with her lids closed. The wind blew harder, and the smell of the dust was in her nostrils.

He took her back as far as the park and there he let go of her. Then he said: 'Good night, señorita,' and walked away very quickly. He was happy because she had not asked for any money.

The next year when he came down to the town he waited at the station four afternoons to see the train come in. The last afternoon he went to the cemetery and sat near the small square building that had the stone woman on top of it. On the ground the dust blew past. The enormous clouds hung in the sky and the vultures were there high above him. As he smoked he recalled the yellow-haired woman. After a time he began to weep, and rolled over on to the earth, clutching the pebbles as he sobbed. An old woman of the town, who came every day to her son's grave, passed near to him. Seeing him, she shook her head and murmured to herself: 'He has lost his mother'.

BENJAMIN PÉRET

NOTES ON

PRE-COLUMBIAN ART

EQUIPPED everywhere with the same power, the eye, under the different latitudes of the world, contemplates a varied spectacle. If, for the man who rejects racial prejudices, the negro is only distinguishable from the European, the Asiatic and the Indian by the degree of his intellectual development, it is no less true that the world in which he is born, lives and dies, determines the form of his culture and the rhythm of its development. We have only to read Frazer to see that, in time and in place, the same myths haunt or have haunted humanity. The struggle of the eagle and the serpent, incorporated in the coat of arms of contemporary Mexico, can also be found in the Sumerian inscriptions thousands of years before our period. The myth of the virgin mother which the Spanish conquerors brought to America with all the evils of Europe, flourished in the religious world of ancient Mexico under the name of Coatlicue and of Chimalma, immaculate mothers, one from *Hiutzilopochtli*, the other from *Quetzalcoatl*, and there is hardly any personality in Greco-Latin mythology which does not have its more or less exact counterpart in the Mexican or Mayan Olympus. From this it was only too easy to conclude that the American people had maintained relations at different periods with Europe, either through the agency of St. Thomas, identified by the Catholic priests with *Quetzalcoatl*, or because of the possible existence of Atlantis.

However, rejecting these over-simple explanations, we are none the less impressed by the common fact that, everywhere on the globe, man is passing or has passed through the same stages, and has endowed the same natural force with divinity before worshipping his subjugation of these forces. The more primitive man has remained, the more his imagination has preserved its narrow ties with the immediately perceptible exterior world, in order to develop itself later in a parallel way to the vividness of this perception. The exterior world acts on the imagination which, stimulated, reacts in its turn on the exterior world and interprets it poetically before imperceptibly

attempting to modify it according to its desires and needs. But this imagination wells up from an unconscious depth common to every man and the primitive of today not only shows us what we have been yesterday, but what we still really are underneath the cheap finery of modern education, and what the civilized man is vainly trying to forget: men who still have hardly any more awareness of their own natures than they had in the remotest ages.

Art naturally follows the same path, for it is born of a desire to give form to the divinity which man has previously invented. Poetry, therefore, precedes plastic art, for man uses his imagination before possessing the means permitting him to give a form to the creatures born of his desires and of his agonies. For this reason, it is a fact that in America, for example, the legends of the primitive peoples of the Amazon forests, at the moment when they first discovered plastic art, have a poetical richness which contrasts strangely with the poverty of the pre-Columbian Mexican myths known to us in which there is an element of philosophical thought and where art reached a level unsurpassed on any other part of the new continent.

It would not make sense to speak of art with reference to the pre-Columbian plastic production if we keep to the current definition of this word; that art is 'a disinterested activity of the mind' directed towards the creation of beauty. And by beauty here we mean exclusively the classical Greco-Latin canon. Now it is obvious that the products of the pre-Columbian peoples do not answer to this definition, any more than does negro sculpture, the works of any primitive people, or the paintings of the Middle Ages, the sculpture of ancient Egypt, of China or of elsewhere. And yet no one, without showing lack of understanding, blindness or prejudice, can prevent himself from experiencing a real and profound emotion on looking at some sculpture from Egypt, Oceania or from pre-Columbian America. Does this emotion derive from the strangeness of the object or from its more or less slender connection with the classical art of western Europe? First we should observe that it is not generally the objects nearest to classical art which give the strongest emotive shock, and that ultimately the sensation of strangeness grows in proportion as the object gets further from the classical model. It is also noticeable that the quality of this strangeness is not invariable, since one observer will be sensitive to one object rather than to another, and

that, subsequently, several observers placed in front of the same object, will not all experience this sensation of strangeness or they will feel it in varying degrees. It therefore follows that the strangeness of a given object is only relative. What is the reason for this relativity? This question can only be answered when we have been convinced of the superficial character of this sensation of strangeness. In fact it would appear that this apparent strangeness, as in the case of dreams, only serves to mask a deeper emotion. In other words, the feeling of strangeness would only be the 'obvious content' of an emotion whose 'hidden content' would be quite different, and linked to some repressed childhood memory which the sight of the object in question would stimulate in the semi-darkness of the unconscious.

Certainly, the fairy stories, the wonderful adventures which charmed our childhood years, teem with imaginary people, pre-mythical in a certain way, who are both man and beast and who comprise the child's private world. The adult by taking stock of the exterior world or, more precisely, under the pressure of the exterior world in which he is integrating himself, gradually surrenders his childhood, the joys it procured for him, and the mode of intuitive knowledge which flowed out of it to be replaced by rational knowledge alone. And further, the adult man maintains an attitude of lofty condescension, and almost of condemnation with regard to his own childhood. This explains his surprise and the feeling of alienation caused when he discovers that people have known how to express similar conditions to those which he refuses to be reminded of and this is also the cause of the emotion accompanying this surprise, showing itself all the more strongly as his childhood is closer and dearer to him. Pre-Columbian art is only strange by comparison with immediate reality and in the exact proportion with which this reality participates of the marvellous. Therefore this art will fascinate artists and poets, whereas minds enamoured of rationalism will only be sensitive to the achievements nearest to the classical art of western Europe. The poet and the artist always partake, in varying degrees, of the marvellous, the source of all beauty. On the other hand, the rationalist mind rejects it, being in need of a continual contact with immediate exterior reality.

The unparalleled success of Greco-Latin art which, artistically, satisfies a rationalist tendency, in full swing at the time of its creation, is surely due to this need for contact with the exterior



world. But it is quite certain that, amongst the Indians of pre-Columbian Mexico, the products of classical antiquity would have provoked a criticism very similar to that which Pheidias would have made about some masterpiece of Aztec or Mayan art. Indeed, the pre-Columbian Indian speaks to the imagination in terms of its own language, whereas the Greek sculptor first appeals to reason. Pre-Columbian art, therefore, corresponds more exactly to the deeper intentions of art than the Greco-Latin products which, by relegating imagination to a secondary place, overlook the principal source of all art.

The appetite for knowledge thus shows itself, in the first place, as poetry; for man enjoys speech before he possesses the means of making an independent object of it. But this poetry is entirely directed towards explaining the exterior world which man imagines to be made in his own likeness, obeying needs, impulses, desires and thoughts analogous to his own. The earth trembles with the anger of a raging giant whose fancy he can appease by appropriate offerings, just as the weakest tribe pays tribute to its more powerful neighbour, and as the rain is rebellious or docile to human complaints according to whether one knows or doesn't know the correct words with which to cajole it. For at first it is just a question of words transmitting a thought, the unquestioned all-powerfulness of which preserves a strict communication between man and nature to which he knows he belongs. A mythical cultural cycle begins which soon enriches itself with all the technical discoveries which a sedentary agricultural life will slowly evolve at the expense of its poetic inspiration. In the country with which we are concerned, the Indian works wood which he carves with knives made of chips of obsidian, then the clay which he models with a skill unparalleled throughout the world, and finally stone which he slowly learns to polish and to carve.

Art then makes its first appearance as mythical poetry and the images which man creates for himself at these moments represent, simultaneously, both the supernatural beings of his creation and the bond between him and these imaginary entities which will allow him to win them over. They are figures endowed with magic powers which a whole ritual of sorcery will set in motion. This is the starting-point of all religions and the religions of the pre-Columbian Indians which, at the time of the Spanish conquest had not crystallized themselves around a belief, were still

permeated with a witchcraft and a magic found even now amongst the most developed modern religions.

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According to a hypothesis still widely debated although it appears to be solidly founded, all the Mexican and pre-Columbian Central American cultures have descended from a mother-culture : from that of the Olmecs whose name derived from *nahua ulmecatl*, meaning 'men from the country of rubber'. It hasn't yet been possible to fix a date, even approximately, for the Olmec invasion.

The Mexican historian of pre-Columbian art, Salvador Toscano, considers that an atmosphere of horror suffuses the art of the archaic period. This horror certainly does exist in some of the figures of the period, but the predominating characteristics seem rather to be a grace, an elegance, and a childish freshness that are only rarely found in the later periods when this terrible and horrifying character then develops to invade all pre-Columbian plastic art.

The co-existence of two such different tendencies in the oldest of the pre-Columbian Mexican cultures is easily explained, it seems to me, if one remembers that religious ideas are all born from the cult of the dead which rests on an ambivalent feeling with regard to death. In fact, the physical terror, inspired by death, evokes the consoling idea that something of the dead man exists in an invisible world from where, in various guises, it assures the protection of the living who know how to win its favours. This ambivalent attitude, source of the idea of the soul, persists today among the Mexican people and expresses itself, for example, in the exquisitely decorated sugar death's heads, marked with the name of the dead person, which are found in confectionery stores all over Mexico on All Saints' Day. However, this atmosphere of terror hardly existed in the archaic period, most likely because of the feeble development of religious ideas which were probably limited, at that time, to their primordial magical expression, whereas later they constituted the very heart of pre-Columbian society.

The Indian of the archaic period was in direct contact with nature which he had already explained in terms of poetry, and, under the impulse of these primitive myths almost completely emptied of moral sanction, he has created, in a society in which the division of labour was still rudimentary, these elegant terracotta statuettes which show continual technical progress, from the

earliest to the most recent. There must be hundreds of years difference between the coarse idols obtained by a process of *pastillage* and the delicately coloured and modelled figures of the kind reproduced here.

Although knowing almost nothing about the first people of the archaic period, we do know that those of the more recent peoples, immediately preceding or accompanying the first stages of the great Mexican civilizations, had already attained a relatively high level of culture, that they were familiar with various materials and with the art of colouring them, and that they had domestic animals, various gods, etc.

The final phases of archaic culture take place on the Central Mexican plateau, mixed up with the beginning of the Teotihuacan civilization and, in the south, on the borders of Guatemala, with the birth of the Mayan civilization.

But another culture had already attained a higher level at the time of the zenith of the archaic world: that of the Olmecs.

In distinction to the archaic figures and even to those of subsequent civilizations of which numerous invariable types of a symbolism indecipherable today are known to us, Olmec statues sometimes show a startling naturalism, the expression of an inner life, which is hardly ever found before the appearance of the sensual and refined faces of the old Mayan Empire. Great violence and terrible brutality is often expressed and this contrasts in a striking way with the gently cheerful character of certain other sculptures. But if Olmec art seems to have attained its highest development in the archaic period, it is not archaic in its technique or in its quality. The Olmecs knew the art of carving and of polishing stone as is proved by the enormous heads of La Venta and by the magnificent figures in jade and in other rare stones which have been found all over Mexico, whereas the peoples of the archaic period only knew about terra-cotta.

Olmec art marks a climax of horror and of terror and, as a result, the victory of a religion with strict rites, served by an all-powerful caste of priests, over the primitive magic of the preceding periods; for horror and terror only obtain their civic rights in art with the advent of religion and the ever more complicated ritual fostered under the influence of priests. Even contemporary religions at the highest stage of their evolution still retain this imprint of their origins. Remember the goddess Kali or more recently Christ or The Sacred Heart!

It is curious to note that these Olmecs, whose influence on the art of the peoples of Teotihuacan is indisputable, have transmitted to them none of the brutal character particular to their art. The dominant note in the art of this civilization is a hieratic quality which brings it close to Egyptian art. The artists of Teotihuacan, like those of ancient Egypt, seem to have wished to give a generic, absolute and eternal image of the people of this period rather than an individual, circumstantial yet perishable image of man and of godhead. This does not mean that there is no horror in it, but it denotes the impersonal expression of the Olmecs and it acquires an absolute and almost stereotyped character of which the later civilizations of the Central Mexican plateau were only partly able to rid themselves.

However, if religion, by imposing stricter limitations on the artist's imagination as its dogma becomes more elaborate, necessarily stifles its own exuberance, it produces in its period of ascendancy a new spirit: that of the grandiose and the sublime. In the pyramids of Egypt, the temples of classical antiquity or of India, the medieval cathedrals or the religious cities of Central Mexico, Yucatan or of Guatemala, in each case we discover this sense of the sublime which expresses itself in the magnificent proportions of Teotihuacan, Chichen Itza, Uxmal, Mitla, etc., where the use of vast open spaces so splendidly shows off the grandiose size of the temples. It is, perhaps, this sense of the sublime which most clearly distinguishes the great contemporary culture of Teotihuacan, when this tendency finds its expression in the archaic pyramids of Cuicuilco and Copilco, as well as in the altars and giant heads of the Olmecs at La Venta, and this obviously indicates the expression of a new material situation, bringing with it new psychological conditions for the peoples concerned. In fact, we can be sure that the appearance of the grandiose in art marks the end of the creative period of mythical poetry and the appearance of rational ideas which first express themselves by the deification of heroes, for when mythical poetry has lost its power to create divinities, it acquires the power to celebrate heroes and to deify them. A new cultural cycle begins: the heroic cycle which is having a renaissance today, with the celebration of false heroes, Hitler and Stalin, etc.

In other respects the development of tribal life leads to a growing division of labour and to the formation of castes of

warriors and of priests in opposition to the mass of producers, farmers and artisans. We can perhaps also find in this period the first signs of the slavery to which all the conquered were submitted. By awakening a feeling of power in the conqueror, the subjection of the conquered facilitates the birth of the cult of the hero, which rapidly attains its full development, and which manifests itself in art by the tendency towards the sublime, noticeable in all the great Mexican civilizations as well as in Europe during the Middle Ages, when serfdom reached its zenith.

The warriors had to create rivalries between the tribes necessitating the forming of a defence corps to withstand the first assault, while the rest of the tribe assembled to repel the invader, and the priests, heirs to the old sorcerers, called on divine protection for the warriors and a curse on their enemies. In any case this alliance of the priest and the warrior appears to be too well formed in its results not to have a very remote origin and an already assured existence in the Teotihuacan civilization and amongst the Mayas of the old empire. This alliance still exists even in the most evolved modern civilizations, as is shown by the pejorative French expression condemning the marriage *du sabre et du goupillon*. It is true that, at the time of which we are speaking, this alliance had a progressive character for, protected by the arms of the warriors, the priests developed culture and the artisans technique, whereas today it only serves to hinder all progress.

It is at this moment that fear and horror completely dominate the pre-Columbian religions which surround themselves with a bloody ceremony, quite in harmony with the war-like customs of the tribes initiating these cults. Art naturally records an immediate reaction to this and the hieratic figures of Teotihuacan are almost completely superseded by savage figures which express the whole horror of these people, torn to pieces by continual wars, haunted by the unconscious fear of serving as an expiatory victim in some bloody sacrifice. The faces of the gods are convulsed, tortured and grimacing. Only the warriors' faces preserve a serenity fitting to their caste which maintains over the whole society a limitless power shared with the priests, which dominates all the intellectual and moral life of the people, the warriors included.

After the fall of Tollan, Central Mexico became a permanent battlefield until the arrival of the Spaniards. The Chichimecs were at perpetual war with all their neighbours whom they dominated

until the next rebellion of the Aztecs succeeded in breaking their yoke, dominating them in their turn and imposing Aztec power over the whole of the Mexican valley.

The most characteristic specimen of Aztec art is certainly the monument of Coatlicue (she who has a skirt of snakes), the virgin mother of Huitzilopochtli, which immediately communicates an atmosphere of horror. With the Toltecs of Tollan and the Chichimecs, art only reflected insecurity, the agony of a life in which war was the daily feature; but with the Aztecs, war, as the ultimate aim of life, insists that fear becomes the psychological axis of the whole people. In other words, if the life of the earlier peoples fostered an atmosphere of terror which reflected itself in their art, the Aztecs make a virtue of horror, and turn it into an instrument of material and moral domination. Their sculpture is obviously aimed at inspiring this terror which, in reality, was only a product of their own unconscious horror. In other words, the exteriorization of this horror in art is therefore only an attempt to dominate it.

At this time the pre-Columbian world underwent essential modifications. After the collapse of Teotihuacan, slavery and servitude attained considerable proportions and all the tribes of the district were subjected to it in turn. Furthermore, those tribes, whose independence could only be preserved by struggle, maintained a war-like tradition which is expressed by their god Huitzilopochtli, derived from a solar myth. This god is, in fact, the image of the sun, a warrior permanently triumphing over darkness. Now it is the custom of primitives to try to scare the adversary in order to assure themselves more easily of victory. There is nothing astonishing in the fact that these aggressive habits, as yet unrelieved by a long sedentary existence, should have had their reaction on all the life, religion and art which came from them. Amongst the people descended from Teotihuacan, war was, in reality, the focal point of the preoccupations of the tribe, and also the highest standard of value. Even religion was subservient to it because, if peace was prolonged, it was necessary to arrange sham fights between neighbouring tribes in order, in the course of imaginary battles, to take prisoners as sacrifices for the gods and, amongst the Aztecs, women who died in childbirth had access to the holy place of Huitzilopochtli, for they were considered as warriors fallen on the field of battle.

However, alongside the peoples of the valley of Mexico, heirs and bearers of an advanced culture, lived peoples whose art had followed a much slower evolution. The Tarascans, if they had learned the art of working stone and metals thanks to the Toltecs, had chiefly continued to model the earth. The techniques of the other peoples and their more finished art had only had a small hold over them. Sometimes their figures, worked according to the old method of *pastillage*, show an artistic skill in great contrast to the poverty of the means employed; sometimes, on the contrary, their figures show a very advanced technique, as well as a survival of the most archaic types. This irregular progress is probably due to the Tarascans' remoteness from the great centres of civilization which, in their case, favoured a kind of hermetic evolution. Polygamy, still practised among them at the arrival of the Spaniards, in distinction to the monogamy of the 'nahuas' of the valley of Mexico, clearly shows the slowness of their evolution. In comparison with the archaic peoples of this region whose art already showed a grace and an elegance attesting a regular and harmonious development, fruit of a relatively happy and easy existence, the Tarascan figures have a monstrous appearance. They have a close similarity to the pictures drawn by children, and express primitive terrors which no poetical explanation can elucidate. The most striking example of this infantilism is given by the illustration of a woman in childbirth, whose baby is being born by the navel.

★                      ★                      ★

The evolution of the pre-Columbian arts shows, at first, a search for more and more stereotyped examples, which, among the cultures of the central plateau, continues from the end of the archaic period without a break. This tendency probably owes its origin to the necessity of identifying for everyone's benefit, the earnestly longed-for, mythical being, and it is inevitably accompanied by more and more severe and complex religious rites which are themselves linked to the birth of a priestly caste.

The attributes with which these images are adorned, follow the same course until the time when man, far from his original image—the image having reached the end of its evolution—touches on the symbol, makes himself abstract, and forms a handwriting which soon permits the more or less exact



transcription of the knowledge already acquired, and its use with a view to further progress. In fact, a process of changing over from intuitive knowledge to rational knowledge has come about which has relegated art to a secondary place. In a parallel way an identical procedure takes place on the purely artistic level, consisting of an attempt to detach art from its religious basis. From the end of the archaic period onwards, we can see an attempt at the realistic representation of the human model. The Olmecs, having a more advanced culture, had already arrived at this point at the same time, it would seem, that they had formed a tradition of their former art whose survival is shown by the man with the jaguar's face. Olmec culture, or, at any rate, some of its elements, fertilizes the last phase of archaic culture from which Teotihuacan is born, and, at the same time, it continues amongst the Mayans of the old empire, whose hieroglyphs are very similar to those of the Olmecs. Then we notice a relative stagnation of art. Even if the civilizations succeeding the Olmec culture contribute their own particular genius, they almost entirely limit themselves to refining the former discoveries up to the time when decadence appears and where new, younger and more energetic people take possession of the former culture. The appearance at each state, of stereotyped figures, more or less derived from former creations but incorporating new features, shows both the slowness of the culture and the persistence of an effort which was completely broken by the Spanish invasion. But would the pre-Columbian cultures have been able to progress to the level of Europe, deprived as they were of material means? In any case the rhythm of their evolution would have remained very slow, but this was no good reason to destroy them.

[Translated by PETER WATSON]

## SELECTED NOTICE

*Syria, an Historical Appreciation* by Robin Fedden. Robert Hale Ltd. 21s. 287 pp. Illustrated.

MR. FEDDEN, who has written this very accomplished book on Syria, is a scholar, poet and traveller who has already won the praise of the discerning as author of a good book on Egypt, a study of suicide, a novel and poems, and as editor of *Personal Landscape*. He has brought to the writing of the present book the varied talents of an analyst of human nature, a curious observer of the human scene, a historian and topographer and a poet.

The main subject of his book is neither the politics of Syria nor its peoples, but its historical monuments. 'All over Syria', Mr. Fedden says in his introduction, 'there stand in the deserts, in the mountains, along the shore, astonishing and romantic monuments which in spite of their non-contemporaneity dispute with the people and the natural world the most prominent place in the Syrian scene. This book is mainly about these monuments and the way in which they have accumulated on Syrian soil in the stratification of time.' The plan of the book is broadly chronological. Each chapter deals with one period; a historical sketch of the period and an estimate of its importance in Syrian history are followed by a study of the principal monuments it has left, and to this is added a description of some region of the country or some aspect of popular life which, in the author's imagination, is closely linked with that period.

The writing is always lucid, imaged, and careful, and at times flowers into exquisite felicity of phrase, whether to describe a sight or evoke a mood. Mr. Fedden has that rare quality in travellers, the artist's eye. He really sees things, observes them with loving care and the utmost clarity; he has also the poet's gift of describing them, and the power of the meticulous scholar to set them in their historical perspective. His images are precise and convey the sense of something exactly perceived and remembered. Moreover, he sees the monuments which he describes not as isolated photographic 'stills', each to be flashed in front of a passive and recumbent audience, but as living objects, each standing in its own country and at the end of its own road: as the central point of a landscape and the goal of a journey. Mr. Fedden's book is first hand not only in the sense that he has seen everything he describes, but in the sense that he has made efforts to see it, and that for him the journey has often been no less memorable than the goal. His book is full of memories of Syrian travel, the stony hill-sides, the wind, the scent of oranges, the rare birds, strange foods eaten in distant places, the feel of tired limbs which only heightens the poignancy of visual beauty and the sharpness and enthusiasm of the inquiring mind.

These qualities are bound up with one which is rarer still in travellers. Mr. Fedden's interest is wholly outside himself and concentrated on the object. There have been too many books about the Arab world, from the product of T. E. Lawrence's tortured egoism onwards, in which the writer himself has stood at the front of the stage, and the country has only appeared as the back-cloth, its people only as the bickerers in the market-place or the brawling soldiers around the camp fire who, in a play of Shakespeare, provide the background against which the monstrous heroes strut, jealousy and ambition run their appointed courses and love builds its own funeral pyre. Fortunately Mr. Fedden is not one of these romantic travellers. He is more closely akin to the eighteenth-century voyagers who could stand in selfless awe before the monuments of past magnificence, and for whom the spectacle of embodied greatness and of splendour in decay could arouse emotions more profound than the doubts and questionings of a single mind. He never obtrudes himself. He is never an object of his own perception, and appears in the book only as the subjective consciousness which receives and records impressions, selects and arranges, and draws all together into an intelligible whole. Paradoxically,

without once using the word 'I' he builds up by implication a clear portrait of himself. There emerges a picture of a man in whom sensibility and reason are happily married with one another; one who has clear and high standards and cannot endure the second-rate; a humanist who loves the work of man's hands, but at the same time a trained observer of flowers and birds; a lover of ease and leisure, who feels himself much in sympathy with the Turkish cult of idleness; perhaps in consequence a little inclined to judge harshly (I do not myself think that the restaurants of Syria are so bad, or the women of Damascus so shoddily dressed, as he suggests); and a man of warm human sympathies and wide understanding.

The tenth-century traveller quoted on the title page called Syria 'a land of blessing', and this book well illustrates the amazing complexity and fullness of the country's past. Mr. Fedden brings out clearly the role of Syria as a place where almost all the great movements of Mediterranean history have flowed together. At times, when the Mediterranean world has been divided against itself, Syria has been the battlefield of conflicting tendencies; at other times, when the Mediterranean world has been united, Syria has been nearer to achieving an inner harmony. It has always, however, been open to influences flowing in from outside, and in consequence, as Mr. Fedden remarks, it 'has had no chance to find itself, no chance to crystallize out into any unambiguous and homogeneous form'. This has caused and still causes suffering and difficulty for the inhabitants, but it has also been the cause of enrichment. Every age of Mediterranean history has left a profusion of monuments. Mr. Fedden knows Greece well and has a wide knowledge of European literature. He is perhaps sometimes tempted to regard Syria primarily as an outpost of Western civilization and to see it through literary eyes; but much of what he says about the relics of Arab and Turkish rule is true and penetrating. Moreover, he is aware of the continuity underlying the different phases and behind the changing face of the country. If the book has a heroine, it is Syria herself, striving always to express her national genius in different forms, but always unfulfilled. There is, Mr. Fedden says, 'no single Syrian type or personality. There have been continually the elements of such a personality and an obscure straining towards it, visible for instance in the nationalist character of the Syrian heresies and the native twist which Syria always gives to the arts of the foreigner, but there has never been the rounded fulfilled whole.'

'Hence,' he continues, 'the intense variety of Syria—a variety of faith, culture, outlook, aspiration—which makes it so complex a place, and at the same time so fascinating and so richly coloured.' He has a sharp eye for such variety in its many forms. Again and again he draws attention to 'the curious and unordinary': the camels among the snows of Lebanon; the pathos of decay, of the village which was once Palmyra, the waterless aqueducts of Hauran, the empty palaces of emperors and caliphs, the lost imperial roads recovered by aerial photographs, all giving an intense melancholy to the Syrian hinterland; the Christian inscription in the Mosque at Damascus, proclaiming to Moslem worshippers that 'Thy Kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting Kingdom'; the orange gardens of Sidon; the eighteenth-century elegance of Hama; the places where the sown lands merge into steppe and desert, as at the edge of the Oasis of Damascus where 'among mud cottages

rise three giant Corinthian pillars of black basalt. Enigmatic and impressive, they mark the farthest limit of the Oasis. There is nothing beyond.'

Although the peoples of Syria are not his main theme, nevertheless he writes of them with great sympathy. This sympathy extends even to the educated, partly Westernized Arabs of the towns, whom most European travellers pass by with a gesture of contempt or resentment. 'The Westerner must remember . . . that he is present at a birth and that an *accouchement* is not attractive. Sympathy rather than objectivity is the virtue called for. As a mere passer-by it is probably all that he can give to a country in labour.'

There is, however, one limitation to his sympathy, a limitation which is perhaps a necessary complement to his qualities. He has an eighteenth-century suspicion of enthusiasm and does not find it easy to understand passionate belief. This applies equally to political and to religious belief. Thus his description of the political atmosphere of Damascus is one of the few pages in the book which might have been better omitted. He sees the emotional effervescence on the surface but perhaps does not grasp the greatness of Damascus and all it has meant for the Arab world. For forty years it has been the heart of the Arab movement, always faithful to an ideal of national honour and unity, always in open or concealed revolt against oppression; it wears today the scars of three French bombardments, and Mr. Fedden, who is so sensitive to the pathos of greatness in ruin, might have paused to pay tribute to the burnt houses and the heaps of rubble around the Omayyad Mosque. Similarly, he takes too Gibbonian a view of the great religious controversies which have been the main theme of so many periods of Syrian history. For him they are nothing but disputes over words, and his tone when he writes of them is almost patronizing.

The last chapter, on the present-day scene, is very balanced and fair. Mr. Fedden's statement of the Syrian case against France and Great Britain is forceful and accurate, in particular his remarks about the partition of geographical Syria after the first World War. He is, however, rather kinder to the French than they deserve. Himself a lover of French culture, he might have pointed out how much the alliance between the French Government and the Catholic schools has done to destroy France's cultural position in Syria. He tends to attribute to the work of the Mandatory Government the rise in economic, social and intellectual standards which is really only one aspect of a universal trend throughout the Middle East. To his statement of Syrian grievances against France, he might have added that the French civil and military officials throughout the Mandatory period were too often greedy, corrupt, brutal, suspicious and inefficient. This was particularly so during the war years when, in what were admittedly very trying circumstances, the whole morale of the French administration collapsed. Who that was in Syria between 1941 and 1945 can forget the strange political atmosphere, an atmosphere of universal distrust and hatred, with French officials struggling unintelligently to safeguard their own futures or save what they could from the wreckage of the French position in the Levant?

A word of praise must be given to those responsible for the photographs which adorn the book. With one or two exceptions, they are all unusual, often very beautiful and well reproduced.

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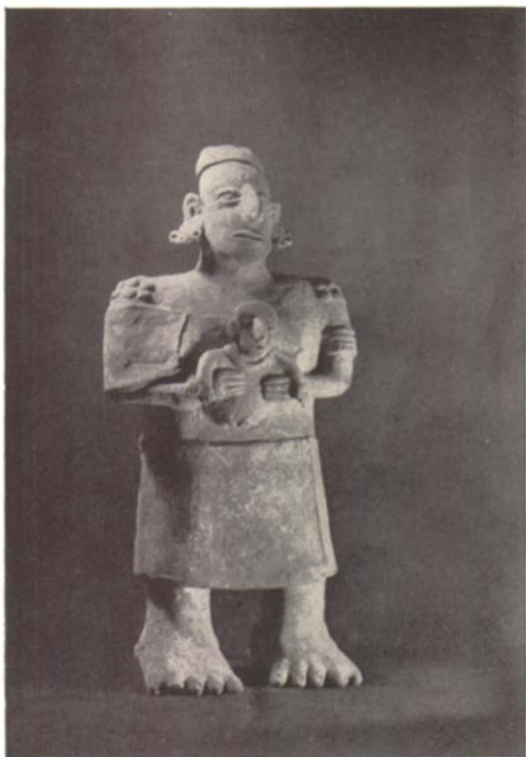


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